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MARY FRANK *21 1/4" x 21" x 15"*
"Untitled" 1983, ceramic,

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Ceramic
Sculpture**

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April 28, 1984**

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Judy Moonelis

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Letters

Editor's Note

With this issue, we are pleased to begin publishing letters from our readers. We hope you will consider the pages of *American Ceramics* an open forum—an opportunity to discuss not only what is published in the magazine, but to raise new issues, to voice concerns not yet aired in these pages. Please address correspondence to: Michael McTwigan, *American Ceramics*, 15 West 44 Street, New York, NY 10036. Include a telephone number where we may reach you should your letter require editing.

Shards or Splinters?

Robert C. Morgan's article, "Reconstructing with Shards" (*American Ceramics*, 2/1) raised several important issues relative to the use of shards in contemporary and historic artworks, and the role of shards as sociologically loaded images. Unfortunately, his apparent lack of awareness of contemporary work constructed with ceramic shards as either primary or secondary imagery has undermined the strength of his arguments; arguments which are further weakened by the presence of peripheral issues and the injection of a somewhat confused treatise on the power of impulse, observation, and faith.

Questioning the usual priority of the ceramic object over the painted imagery on its surface, Morgan asks himself, "Is there not a single artist working today who may have reversed this process, thus solving the problem from a different angle entirely?" Delving deeply into recent SoHo exhibitions, Morgan uncovers the broken plate works of Julian Schnabel as the answer to his question. Yet, over the past decade or so many artists working with clay have perceived shards in their archaeological, psychological, and/or autobiographical primacy and have utilized them in their work; notably, Rick Dillingham, Martha Holt, and Ken Little. These artists' works have been documented in periodicals such as *Ceramics Monthly*, *American Craft*, *Arts*, and others. Susan Weschler's book, *Low-Fire Ceramics*, contains lengthy interviews with two of the above-mentioned artists. These members of the present generation of artists have by no means "lost touch with the historical and psychological impact which the discovery and reconstruction of shards has had upon former generations." Morgan himself, however, seems to suffer from the very

media-directed sense of history of which he accuses this generation of artists. Indeed, symptomatic of that affliction, Morgan's inadequate selection of artists in support of his argument for the expressive potential of shards nearly denies his own premise. While it is true that definitionally a shard is simply a small bit of ceramic material, the expressive potential of the shard, as Morgan points out, derives from its potential for harm (such as broken glass) or its sociological connotations (such as Mimbres pottery, the broken shard society, et cetera). Michael Lucero's figurative works often use broken bits of ceramics laced to a framework to form the body and textural surface of his sculptures. These bits, however, are not shards in an archaeological or dangerous sense, but initial units that are designed specifically for the sculptures. They do not enter our world with the psychological baggage inherent in being the broken remains of some other object; they enter instead as formal sculptural elements of no particular history beyond their primary role in Lucero's work. He is constructing with these units; not in the least is he reconstructing with them.

Since the artworks he has chosen as illustrations are often hard pressed to serve as foundations for his arguments, Morgan turns to other sources. In a display of art world guilt by association, he mentions Marcel Duchamp (whose *Large Glass*, when broken in shipment, Duchamp declared as an example of his own theory of chance operations); Joseph Cornell (whose work doesn't have anything to do with the subject of the article, but whose boxes were about the same size as Carolee Schneemann's, which sometimes have broken glass in them); Man Ray (who painted a series of "revolving door" paintings which Morgan thinks may be related to Schnabel's angst); William Wegman (who uses a dog named Man Ray in his work); Man Ray the dog (who, like the original Man Ray, may have a generic relation to Schnabel's concerns); finally, the venerable Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose relationship to the article even Morgan admits is "purely happenstantial."

The article finishes with an appeal for a meaningful sense of being in the material world. To get there, however, we are told in quick succession that: shards, while never visually neutral elements, when used by artists can be variously interpreted, though

their main interpretation derives from the interpretation of the artwork as a whole; that artists often have destructive and constructive impulses, but that no artistic impulse is greater than life because life is greater than art; that observation is greater than the analysis of observation; observation should be detached from sentiment, though detachment of the observer is difficult and only rarely guarantees the existence of quality artwork to observe; however, faith is even stronger than detached observation; faith sets the spirit free; with a free spirit, a meaningful sense of being can be restored to the material world, though it may require piercing a Mimbres bowl.

Without even arguing the merits of these individual revelations, their serial status as non sequiturs is hard to surpass. The basic concept of Morgan's article is unfortunately a worthy one, and deserves better treatment than it received at the hands of its author.

Robert Milnes
Edinboro State College
Edinboro, Pennsylvania

The author replies:

I agree that an article on the use of ceramic shards by contemporary ceramists would be of considerable value to prospective historians involved in that field of inquiry. Contrary to Robert Milnes's assumption, however, my article does not concern itself with this problem. My intentions in writing "Reconstructing with Shards" were basically twofold: (1) to explore the meaning of shards as loaded signifiers in Western culture—regardless of the technical and pragmatic claims made by artists, and regardless of whether the shards were derived from glass, clay, or moldware; and (2) to give Julian Schnabel's *Plate Paintings* a frame of reference radically different from the mainstream "Neo-Expressionist" interpretations being attributed to his work at the time. Milnes's remarks, including his misleading manipulations of my statements, are framed to suit another purpose entirely. He begs for another kind of article to be written—one that I can only hope he pursues in the near future.

Robert C. Morgan

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(Cover) Detail of three recent figures by Viola Frey, whose work will be featured in a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (July 25-September 30, 1984). Courtesy Quay Gallery, San Francisco. Photo: M. Lee Fatherree.

INTERVIEW



Susan Wechsler

Views on the Figure

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Jeff Kelley

Viola Frey

Page 26.

CHRONICLE

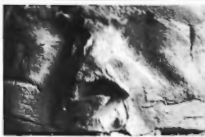


Barbara Perry

The Figure Emerges

American Clay Sculpture: 1925-1950, page 34.

PORTFOLIO



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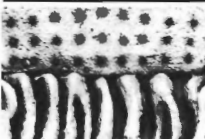


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Mark Burns: Saints and Sinners

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KIRK
MANGUS
"City Man Series"



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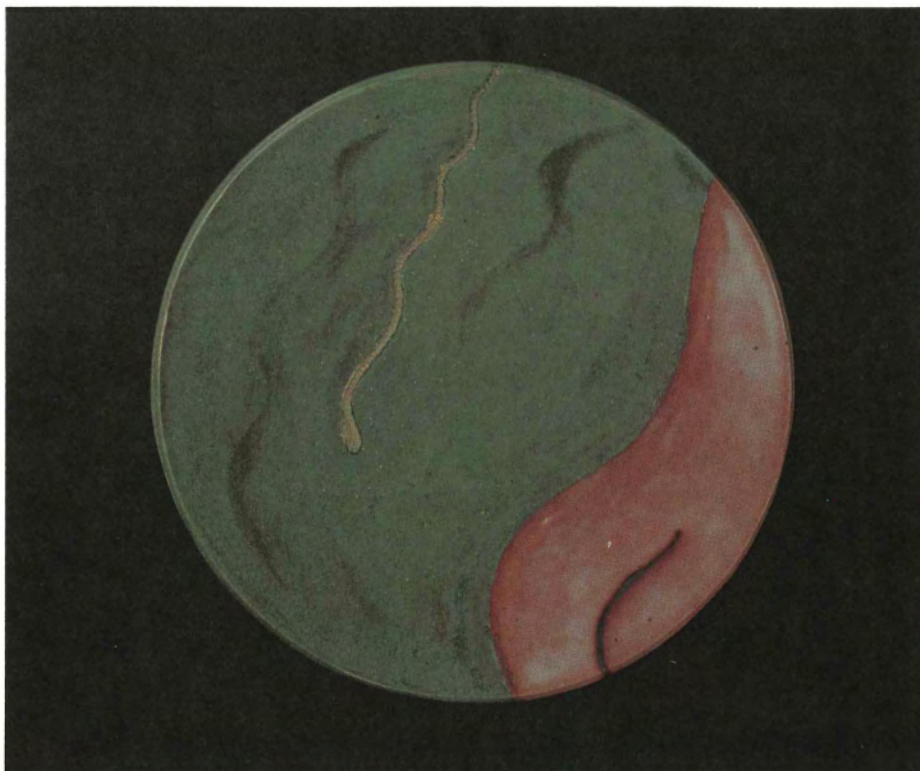
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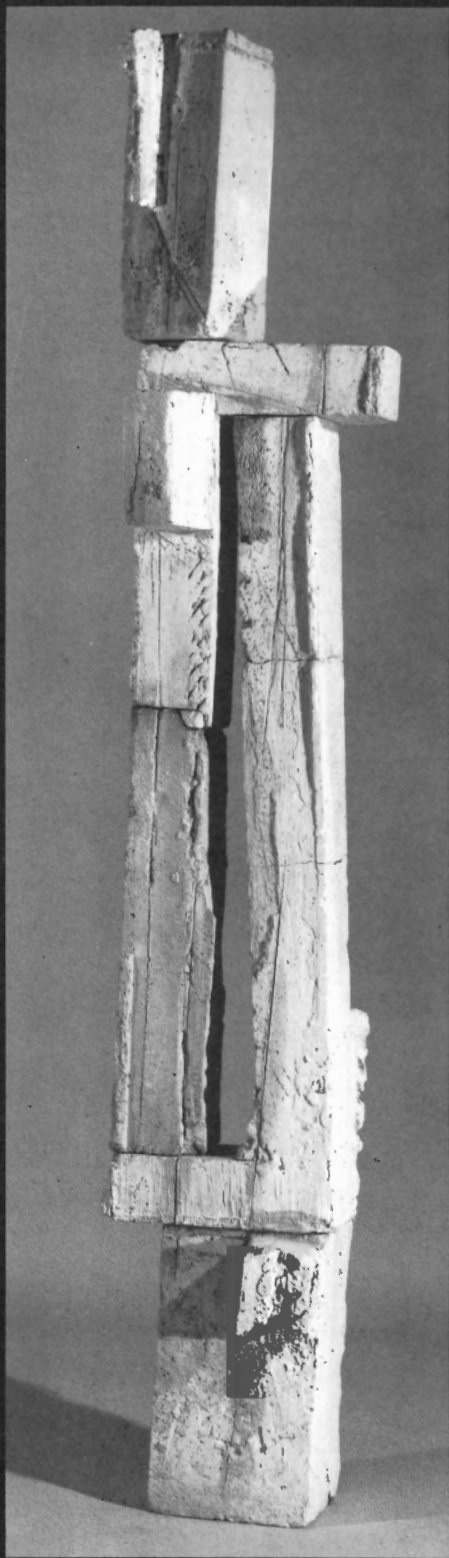
photo: M. Lee Fatherree

Sculpture and Paintings

VIOLA FREY

April 28 - May 26

DENNIS GALLAGHER



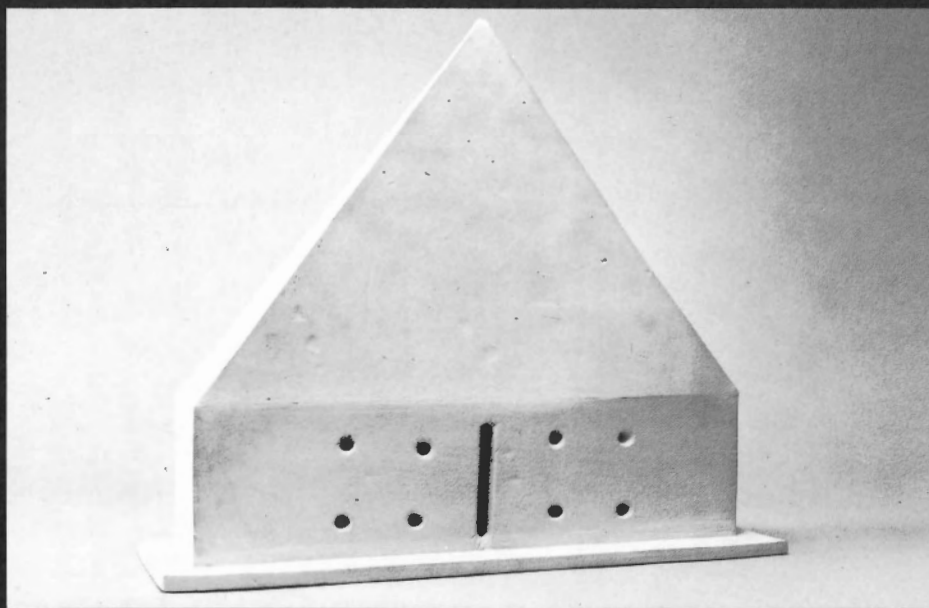
Untitled, 1983, ceramic, 86" x 16" x 15"

CHRISTINA BERTONI



Perigee, '83, glazed earthenware, 6 x 14 x 12½"

WILLIAM WYMAN



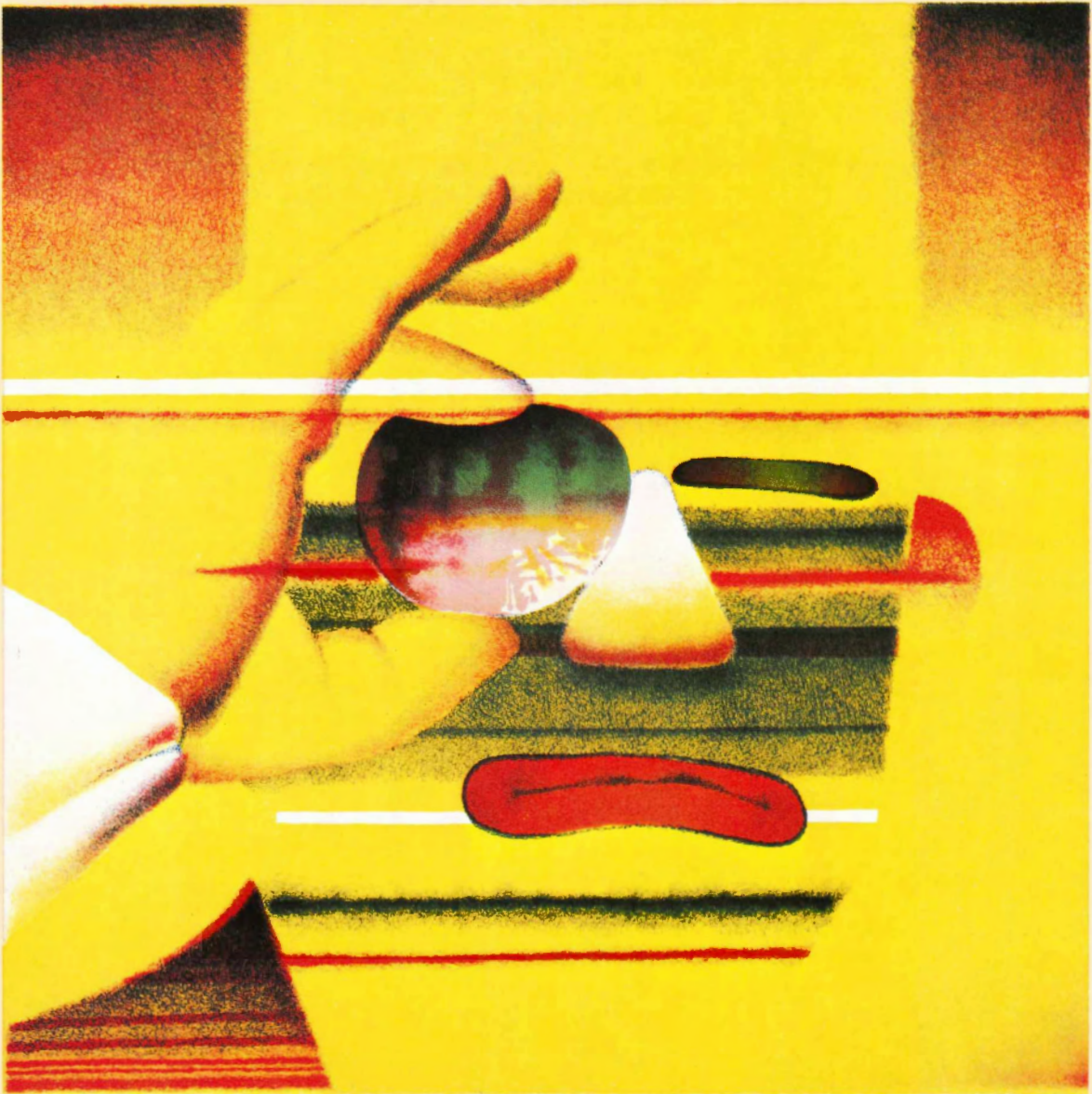
Temple No. 30, 1979, white clay, 16½" x 19" x 5¾"

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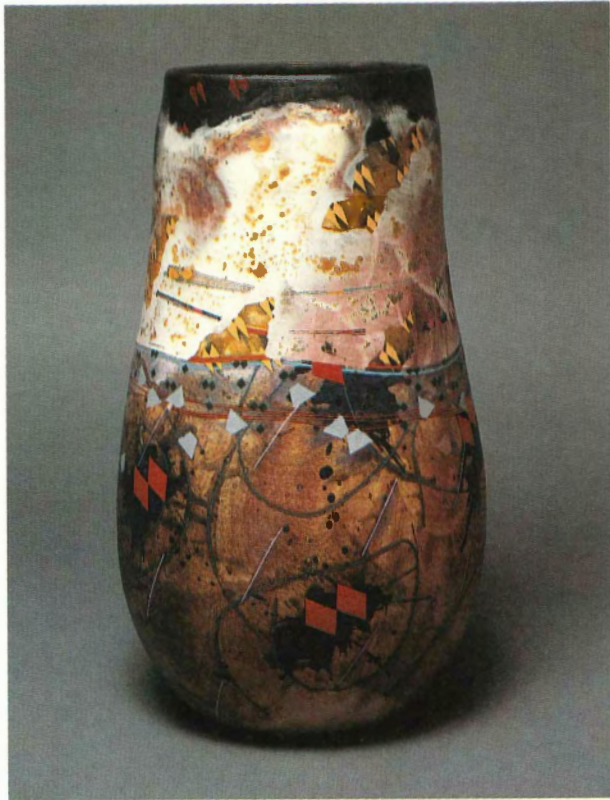
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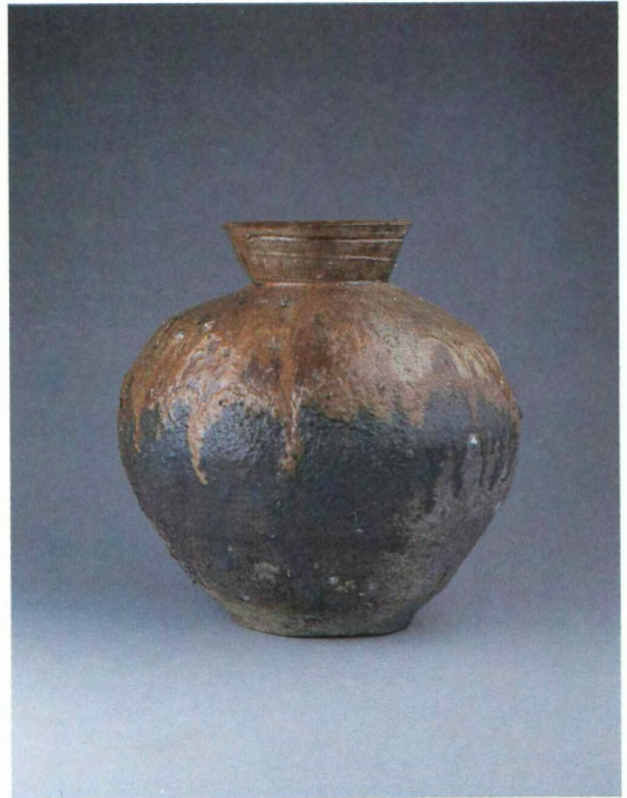
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Views on the Figure

Susan Wechsler

Untitled (1983) by Mary Frank, 21³/₄"
(54.5 cm) high. Courtesy Quay Gallery,
San Francisco. Photo: Ralph Gabriner.

In broad terms, there is no mystery about why figurative expressionism revived. Like any other unforeseen event, it was, of course, inevitable. People want to look at images.¹
Robert Hughes

Representation is an impulse, not a style.²
Sidney Tillim

All over Europe and America, from the Italian Trans-Avant-Garde to art schools in Louisiana, the figure looms large on the horizon of contemporary art. What are the reasons for its reappearance? Some say that political uncertainty, combined with the threat of nuclear destruction, have prompted many to seek grounding in personal, more meaningful imagery. Others point to the widespread disillusionment with previous art modes. Certainly the generalized surface of color field painting, the meticulous structures of Minimalism, and the notations of Conceptual Art appeal more to the mind than the heart. Today, many painters and sculptors have chosen the figure to express more emotional alternatives. The body has always been our first means of expression and, more fundamentally, the direct evidence of who we are in the world. No wonder, then, that we so easily identify with figurative art, so readily understand ideas put in human context. Consequently, an unbroken tradition of figurative imagery is found in art, from the earliest female fertility symbols, to the explosive psychological portraits of German Expressionism, to the cool, stylized renderings of Pop Art. Even during the heyday of nonobjective painting in this country, there were those who exploited the emotional power of the human form. A long-standing representational tradition in California, for example, owes much to the Bay Area figurative artists of the fifties and sixties, who successfully combined expressive abstraction and figuration. In each decade since the dominance of Abstract Expressionism, art critics have anticipated or rejected the return of the figure. Clearly, the figure never really left us, but has remained for artists a fundamental urge.

I've been working with the figure all my life; it would not have been natural to work without an image. People used to ask me, "Aren't you glad that it's come back?" "What do you mean it's come back," I'd say, "it's preposterous." I can't understand this "return to the figure"; it has no meaning for me, because I never left it. That's why I can't respond to why I work with the figure. It's almost like being asked, "Why do you breathe?" or "Why are you working in the first place?" I can't imagine any reason not to deal with the figure. I mean, it is what you are after all, so why not deal with it? One day I was just thinking of the word, human being. What a strange word that is. In French, it is the same, just turned around—être humain. And that is what it is—it's just being human. Just trying to feel what on earth that is.—Mary Frank

Coming from the Bay Area, I do come out of an atmosphere in which our heroes were from the figurative school, our teachers were involved in that spiritual dialogue. Even when I was not directly figurative, when I was an object maker, I tried to put into a work something of my existence—that also means my frailties, my weaknesses, my sophomoric humor—whatever marks me as a person, an American individual of the twentieth century. What have I experienced and how can this attitude not become sophisticated? How can I come through it just directly in a raw way, and then think about it later? The figure allows you to deal with the human condition, it allows for that political statement, and I find those things very vital forces in art.

—Robert Arneson

I think it's a basic human impulse to project anthropomorphism outward in art—to make things in the human form, or to assign that form to things that aren't specifically human. That's what happens in pottery, in the language of it—the lip, the foot, the belly. It's a kind of natural impulse.

I'm one of those people who responds to things seen in the world, and to the human figure particularly, and to animal figuration. I deal with imagery that's basically intimate. I do things that I see and pay attention to, and particularly the details of those things, like the way skin folds.—Joe Bova

It seems so fundamental to work in a figurative fashion, it's a wonderful form to express emotional content. To me, it's as simple as this: I understand what a figure is, as opposed to really understanding what abstract things are. I may understand abstraction formally, but I don't really know what deep personal meaning it has. Primitive artists don't work in abstract ways; they talk about things in their lives and in themselves. I understand what a tree is, I understand what a dog is, I understand what a person is, 'cause I'm one. —Robert Brady

I think the figure is inevitable . . . because we live inside a body that, for better or worse, is home. Dealing with the figure is dealing with our life in the most direct sense.

We can't escape the fragility of our life . . . it seems so precarious to be alive. Even though we attempt to create an illusion of permanence, stability, and order through our culture, the very opposite is what we have to live with. Anxieties of our age certainly press on us all the time, whether we're conscious of them or not, and they reinforce that sense of fragility. —Stephen DeStaele

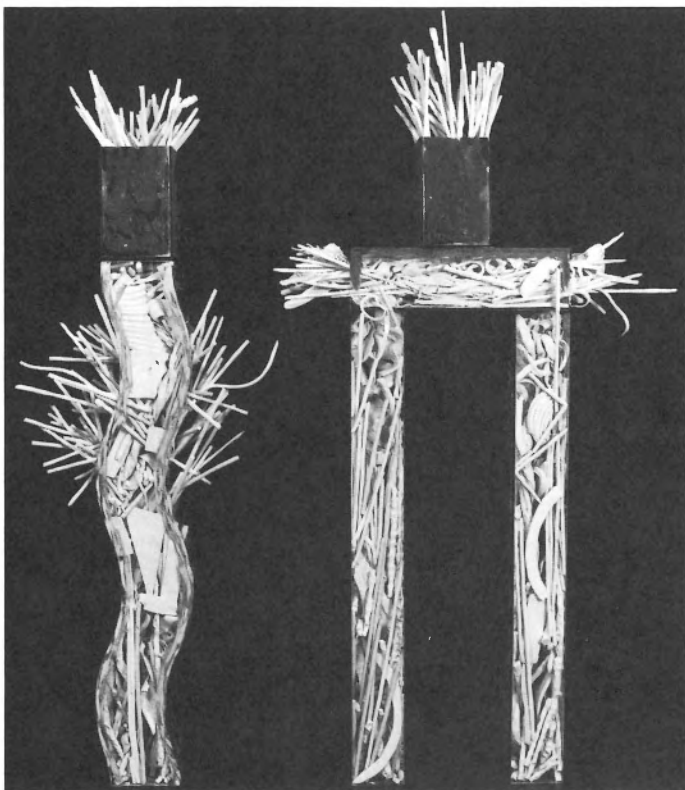
Coming to the figure was an evolutionary process for me. When I was a potter, I was thinking about putting elements on my pottery that had something to do with the place where the pottery might come from. I did lots of research into the decoration, and the culture, and that became more interesting than the pot itself; I wanted to put more information into the object so someone else could get as excited about it as I could.

As I got more interested in my own personal narrative, I would make little storyboards or vignettes about situations that would happen to me—interactions with people, or animals, or mythology. It was an exorcism, I guess, getting out bad or good feelings . . . and that became my personal story. —Christine Federighi

I can't hold back the figures. The figures have been waiting for years! My interest goes back to when I was an art student in the Bay Area. Not having much in the way of museums, there was no one to say what art was; the figure was the only thing that stood out.

The figure is a point of synthesis; it also has tradition and is inherent in clay. The search with clay for images and sources was always very widespread, cross culturally and back in time. Figurines emphasized the cross-cultural thing, which was part of the vessel tradition in ceramics. The figurine had become more and more degraded, and so tasteless, that I was able to use it again.

I like to do the figure because I like to make it very general, and very accessible. It doesn't have to be specific. When one is doing the figure, it's what you bring to it. There's nothing radical that you can do—almost anything can be figurative—so that the changes have to occur within the person. I've had to change as much as the figures. At a certain point, I begin to feel that I'm their little slave or troll, climbing up ladders to work on their heads. With the figure, you never know who's possessing whom.—Viola Frey



I started using the figure as early as I can remember . . . when I was three or four years old, painting china with my grandmother. To me, the term figuration includes not only the human figure or human things, but animals. It can also include extensions of the figure: furniture, things we sit or lie on, cars. It's not specifically the figure that I'm studying as much as the figure within a context—with objects, or spaces, or emotional situations.

When you use an identifiable object that relates to a figure, you leave the door open to anyone who doesn't necessarily know anything about art—and can't appreciate the thing for its formal qualities, but can appreciate it as an image. There's an image there that people can read. I like leaving that door open . . . it's kind of a populist way of looking at art.—Ken Little

There is something there that is powerful about the figure. It's like a form from ancient time, it's the first symbol of man. The figure is just a form that we can all identify with, and communicate this emotion or whatever. Every idea has to eventually take form; the figure is the format on which all the other ideas come in . . . it's not really the idea itself. I don't only want my work to be figurative, however . . . it's not only about the figure, it's about me, really, and it's about expressing myself, expressing my own ideas with this form.—Michael Lucero

I've played with using the figure a lot; I think, primarily, it was a way to simplify the format for my ideas. In looking back, I see it as a way to get more directly to my ideas—which are about people and about emotional states. Using the figure is a means of direct expression. It gives the viewer very direct access . . . it's an image all people relate to.—Judy Moonelis

Since the first representational figures appeared, about 17,000 years ago, elaborate symbolic and metaphoric systems have been attached to the human form. But is it so surprising that human skulls unearthed in Jericho, Jordan, dating about 700 BC, should be modeled with plaster in a manner similar to those of nineteenth-century New Guinea? (Even the eyes of both are formed with shells.) Despite differences of time or place or motivation, all human beings seem compelled to respond to certain archetypal characteristics of the figure. And despite the multiplicity of meanings attributed to it, "In every culture, certain movements and gestures are recognized as speaking a clear, symbolic language," notes Kenneth Clark.³ There are many human postures, gestures, and facial expressions that we today may understand as well as the artists who first fashioned them.

Figures represented the gods, or humankind's alliance with them (we are made "in God's image," for example), and our strivings toward perfection. Some figures were endowed with all manner of magical powers: they could make harvests abundant, men and women fertile, and warriors victorious; they could heal the sick and protect the healthy from disease and evil spirits. Many early societies believed that the spirit of a person was contained in the head; it was hoped, then, that an effigy of the departed's head would allow the spirit or soul to survive. Other tomb figures were meant to serve or accompany the departed in the afterlife. In the twentieth century, the figure more often symbolizes, and more directly expresses, our emotional or psychological states.

Looking at a Greek torso, it doesn't seem to belong to any one time period; whereas in photography, you see a snapshot from 1920, it looks like 1920. God, when you see one of those Greek things, the power goes beyond time. I don't know what it is; there is that observation, that presence—the human presence. The idea that someone could chisel that into some form of stone is still a partial mystery to me.

—Robert Arneson

I think we project ourselves into animals, particularly those that humans have always been closely associated with. In a way, my animal figures are characters for humans. I do subtle things like put human eyes in animals. . . . I think there's a real mystery there, because animals don't speak or communicate intelligently the way we do. Yet they do things that make you think, "Oh god, how much like that we are!"—Joe Bova

I've never studied some culture's art and tried to allude to it, but my work relates to all primitive cultures in a general way. I've always liked primitive stuff, because it's real direct. They get the whole point across without putting on a realistic nose; they don't make eyes, or anything, like it really is, but it might be more realistic than realism, because it comes from the heart somehow.

I'm well informed and well educated, but when I do my own work, I just sort of make it. The only thing I do that controls these figures is the gesture. I stand in front of a mirror or a window and get my body in a posture that I think is interesting, and I'll do a sketch of that. It sounds pretty simple for me to say, "I just stand there and if I like the posture, I do it," but the reason we like things is because who we are—who we are emotionally, our painful times, our good times—responds to certain things.—Robert Brady

Nature expresses the malleability of what seems eternal—the earth doesn't just sit still, it evolves. It's always fascinated me to think of these great transformations in this earth we live on. They don't mean the end of life or landscape, but remind us that we are merely on a point along the way toward something we can only dream of. If you start equating the body with the landscape, the ground that we come from, a connection grows between the two. I think what I've been dealing with is an emotional carryover of this eternalness of the earth and its transforming power to the human body; so that, by metaphor, the body stands for the earth and vice versa. I think it's an attempt to deal with and transcend the fragility of the body.

—Stephen DeStaeblér

When I think of people or things, they're like fleeting essences to me. I feel that about people or artwork, about poetry or music. It's the essence I like, and it doesn't have a lot of words to it.

These particular images I'm making go back to primitive things—that's the curious thing. I do them, and then I see other historic references: the flatness, the stylization, the scratches on the surface, the masks. Even though we're supposed to be sophisticated, even though we've gone through thousands of years of evolution, there's still these funny marks that continue. I think the figures end up being more like icons. They're static, and they're not scary, but there's a silent presence about them. I guess when I look at my work it's sort of like a humming, like an OM.—Christine Federighi

Certain forms are so compelling, they just keep coming back. Sometimes I won't get away from them, and sometimes, hopefully, they transform themselves. They may look timeless, but it is a quality that appears, in a sense, and is not really asked for. It's probably something about the gestures, maybe the material also. I realize people see archetypes always. I'm not sorry if that's there, but often I'm really concentrating on what the person looks like, what he or she is really focused on, what their body is doing in space. I am drawing live people who are living now. People make those gestures all the time . . . I think even in their sleep they make them.—Mary Frank

I've always considered my figures to be totems, even though they were just in different gestures. Then I began to concentrate on these heads. The head has always been a container of knowledge, like a vessel. I've always sort of liked the heads on my pieces for that reason—they were the containers of messages . . . of whatever I'm thinking at the time. Once I began thinking in terms of cultures and peoples of all kinds, I started making these heads seven at a time, and all of a sudden, seven people would appear. I could not figure them out; I was completely baffled. Who are these seven people? Even though I touched each one similarly, they were all kinds of people from different places and times, and that really excited me.—Michael Lucero



Two Figures (1983) by Ann Gardner, 84" × 36" × 8" (213.3 × 91.4 × 20.3 cm). Photo: Russell Johnson.

Fire Suit with Large Yellow Hands (1982–83) by Viola Frey, 109" (276.9 cm) high. Photo: M. Lee Fatherree. Courtesy Quay Gallery, San Francisco.

Above: Moment at Dawn (1983–84) by Jan Holcomb, 31" × 24" × 8" (77.5 × 60 × 20.3 cm).

The impulse to capture one's own or another's likeness is perhaps the most familiar or common type of figurative representation. The first "harbingers of a tradition of portraiture," comments H. W. Janson, were the human skulls from prehistoric Jericho mentioned previously. Exchanging "transient flesh" for a more lasting substance, plaster was applied to the skull of the departed to insure the perpetuation of his life.⁴ Most portrait sculpture since has been executed in ceramic—even if later transferred to another, more durable material—because clay's plasticity and responsiveness is well suited for direct, rapid modeling of expressions and gestures.

The notion that a portrait could capture the "essence" as well as the likeness of a person began with the Greeks, who revealed generalized psychological characteristics of their subjects. It is the Romans, however, who are remembered for their classic, lifelike renderings of the citizens of the Empire. Many of these studies capture the psychological state of their subject, and transcend their documentary purpose. Portraiture not only documents a culture, but serves to honor its heroes, lament the deceased, and humor the living.

The prestige attached to possessing a likeness of oneself assured the portrait artist continued patronage for his efforts. Unfortunately, much commissioned work was idealistic rather than realistic, dignified rather than expressive, generalized rather than specific. Personal characteristics appeared more often in caricatures, where they were highly exaggerated. Since the invention of photography, artists are no longer obligated to portray things as they are seen (although super-realists seem intent on doing so). Rather, they approach portraiture with new freedom for interpretation and greater understanding of human psychology.

In the mid-sixties, when I was in a period of making toilets, typewriters, and whatnots, I decided to do a real academic problem: a confrontation of myself, using the mirror. I thought it would be a straight one-to-one dialogue—you and your reflection—just in terms of rightness and wrongness. It was not a question of style so much as it was that this eye and that eye had to be somewhat related to the nose and the mouth. So simple, it was like reintroducing myself to art school, and dealing with it in a third dimension, which I had never really done. It was just a completely fascinating experience. . . . I was always captivated by it because it was extremely hard. Academic art is very hard; you have to really have perseverance.

That first portrait really did turn out hilarious . . . and I wasn't trying to do it. But I said, "Maybe there's something in me that does these things." And since I do trust myself, I said, "Well, okay, if for some reason it's there, go with it." I got into the psychology and the goofing off—the artist goofing off, the artist depicted by his children, my art friends in a stereotyped way, or the spirit of them. Then it was people I had never seen, people who I greatly admire—Picasso or Francis Bacon—who, by what they did, allowed me to do whatever little thing I do as an artist.

One has to search back to one's beginnings. I find it interesting that I've come full circle. When I was in high school, I was a sports illustrator for the local paper, so I drew these portraits of local heroes. I was copying Pal, a well-known illustrator from St. Louis. He would do a drawing of the athlete, then around that drawing he would do two or three cartoons, and then some pen-and-ink verbiage. That was the height of my ideal. . . . Later I became a teacher, went through my Voulkos period, and I circled back to what I wanted to do when I was sixteen years old. I still work the same way, from photographs, and the comedy. I feel very good about my beginnings, and I'm there again.

—Robert Arneson

I have no interest in portraiture. They're not specific people, they're not portraits of individuals who exist, and I don't see them as caricatures either. Sometimes they're composites of people I know. I see them as sort of types, maybe even generics.—Joe Bova

I don't ever think about those sculptures being a persona or something; I don't want to. I'm never doing portraiture, except self-portraiture maybe. And if I am, then I'm not doing it about what I looked like, but maybe how I felt at times . . . and I wouldn't even consciously do that. We all tend to make self-portraits; my students can be making a handbuilt pot, and their pot will look like them.—Robert Brady

I discovered toward the beginning of my work with the figure that the face carries an inordinate amount of power. We relate with other people through the face, where we divine their feelings and what's going on in their minds. When I discovered how potent the face was, I felt that it pulled away from the power of the body itself. When you put both together—the body and the head with its face—the latter prevails. Because I've been attempting to knit the figure with its ground, to fuse these feelings about the earth and the figure, the face was too specific. Rather than creating a sense of the timeless, it would ground the figure in the here and now.—Stephen DeStaeblor

It comes down to being attracted to the face. It always starts with the face, because that's really the focus of psychological and emotional energy and information. The figure is like an appendage of the face.—Jan Holcomb

Every artist wants to do the figure; the self-portrait is a traditional subject for the artist. I've always used the figure because of the self-reference. Just the fact that a hand would be your own hand, a head your own head. In my self-portraits, the clothing was perhaps the main focus—it was always the worker's smock, the artist as self-worker. The focus was not on me, and the image of the face was always a logical afterthought.—Viola Frey

I'm interested in approaching the figure in a much broader base than portraiture—more the portrait of a type, or an emotion. In my earlier work, the faces were very representational—there was a nose and eyes—though they definitely weren't realistic. But I got away from that to make them more anonymous, more emotional. The color was more what the face came to be about; it enabled me to use the piece as a whole, instead of just zoning in on the face. The face is what usually draws you in, but by not using specific features, the whole piece draws you in.—Ann Gardner

All through school, my focus was drawing local original subjects, like cowboys. I also did a lot of pictures of my brothers and our dog. . . . Portraits are the subject matter I know the most about. I don't make them just by looking at the people; I make them using the experiences of knowing the people and what I know about people in general. Then I try to portray the relationship between myself and that person. It's not a likeness, it's an equivalent presentation of a whole relationship. It's a portrait of what they look like, but also a portrait of time and space, of interaction and energy—that sort of thing. They are specific people. They are all individual and carry these combinations of real idiosyncratic experiences that nobody else has. At the same time, they are the same as everybody else. So they're strange and foreign and individual, but at the same time they're very common. I really consider portraits to be more realistic than photographs; because the photograph only shows the surface of the skin, the way the light falls on the form, some kind of gesture. The photograph doesn't give the equivalent of the real situation, it only gives the appearance. To me, the realistic photograph is more of a fantasy than the abstraction is.—Ken Little



Standing Figure with Swayback (1978)
by Stephen De Staebler, 71 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (181.6 cm)
high. Photo: Scott McCue.

Clues (1979) by Joe Bova, 15" (27.5 cm) high.
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Shands.

Left: Holy War Head (1982) by Robert
Arneson, 72" (182.9 cm) high. Photo: M. Lee
Fatherree. Courtesy Allan Frumkin Gallery,
New York.





Untitled (1983) by Judy Moonelis,
32" X 40" X 28" (76.7 X 101.6 X 71 cm).
Courtesy Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia.
Photo: Doug Long.

Erupt (1982) by Ken Little, 32" (8.2 cm) high.



When I went into graduate school at the University of Washington, I had been doing all self-portraits. One of the other grads asked me, "Why are you doing yourself over and over again?" I said, "Well, because it's my image and nobody else's." A week later, Lucas Samaras came and he talked about why he always used himself over and over. He basically said it the same way—he said it was his image, it was something that nobody else could use but him, and he felt very private and secure within that image.

I don't really feel my work is a recognizable portrait of myself, however most everything I do happens to probably look like me, whether it be a stylized figure or not. Somehow, the essence of the figure is there, without being so representational—it's a spiritual kind of thing.

I wanted the idea of the portrait to be more than self-portraiture; I wanted them to be just general people. They weren't heroes, they were just people who came out of the work, and that was exciting. They reflected the area—the landscape, the mountains—maybe they were people of that particular area, but I hope not. I hope they were just people who could be anywhere.—Michael Lucero

I started off making the faces as self-portraits, but I don't feel any longer that they are. I certainly don't try to make them physically resemble me, although a lot of the work does. I think that's something that happens without trying. I don't see these as portraits, I see them as ideas. The goal is not to capture a likeness, but to use the face—and all the expressive qualities that eyes, mouths, ears, and noses can have—to convey ideas.—Judy Moonelis

Storytelling is one of man's earliest forms of self-expression. To represent such experiences pictorially or sculpturally, narrative artists usually relied upon the viewer's identification with the human form. Unlike a single image frozen in time, narrative art moves through time, Paul Shimmel tells us, and "controls the viewer's perception by ordering the time, and thereby the space, of the perception."⁵ In this way, our perception of what we view seems to continue in time, relating to both past and future. Whether produced in response to a religious, political, or historical event, or simply as an extension of the human imagination, narrative art is one of the most telling forms of cultural documentation. Figurines, for example, tell us how a civilization dressed and ate, how they worked and played, how they courted and danced. Figurines also embody a people's dreams and fantasies. And their intimate scale intensifies the viewer's identification with the narrative. Early Cyprus votive figures, T'ang dynasty dancers and musicians, Staffordshire animals, and Meissen harlequins and ballerinas sympathetically project their viewers into ritual, theater, landscape, or fantasy.

Fantasy is real important to me. It's what saves me from the real world. It's a constant battle to keep myself up there on some sort of high plane. My fantasies come from my own experience—with my horse, my birds, or my friends. Also, when I would read something, I used to experience the story. It would become part of me. I became so absorbed in the culture and the stories and translating it to my own work—I was so burdened with trying to tell a story every time—the story and the title of the piece started to become more important than the piece itself. To get the work stronger, I had to cull out some things, not put so much into the narratives, and try to focus on a single image that could represent a broader narrative.

—Christine Federighi

My interest is in expression, and the narrative is another way to get an idea out—it's a much fuller way. It lets me develop an idea or an environment or a setting, to have relationships between figures, to have more than one figure in a piece, or to have the figure relating to a landscape, to nature, or to the frame itself. It just seems a lot richer.

—Jan Holcomb

My figures don't tell a story about this relationship that I have with the thing. I don't want anyone to know that I had a fight one week—it's not literally that narrative. But they are about a moving sense of time, portrayed in a static object. Rather than a linear narrative, which may go from beginning to middle to end or conclusion, I feel there's a certain kind of vibration, a kind of hum—that kind of narrative.

—Ken Little

Historically, when you look back, it's rare that small narrative sculpture is ever much of anything; it becomes minor very quickly. I like it better when it's done in molds and made by the millions!

—Viola Frey

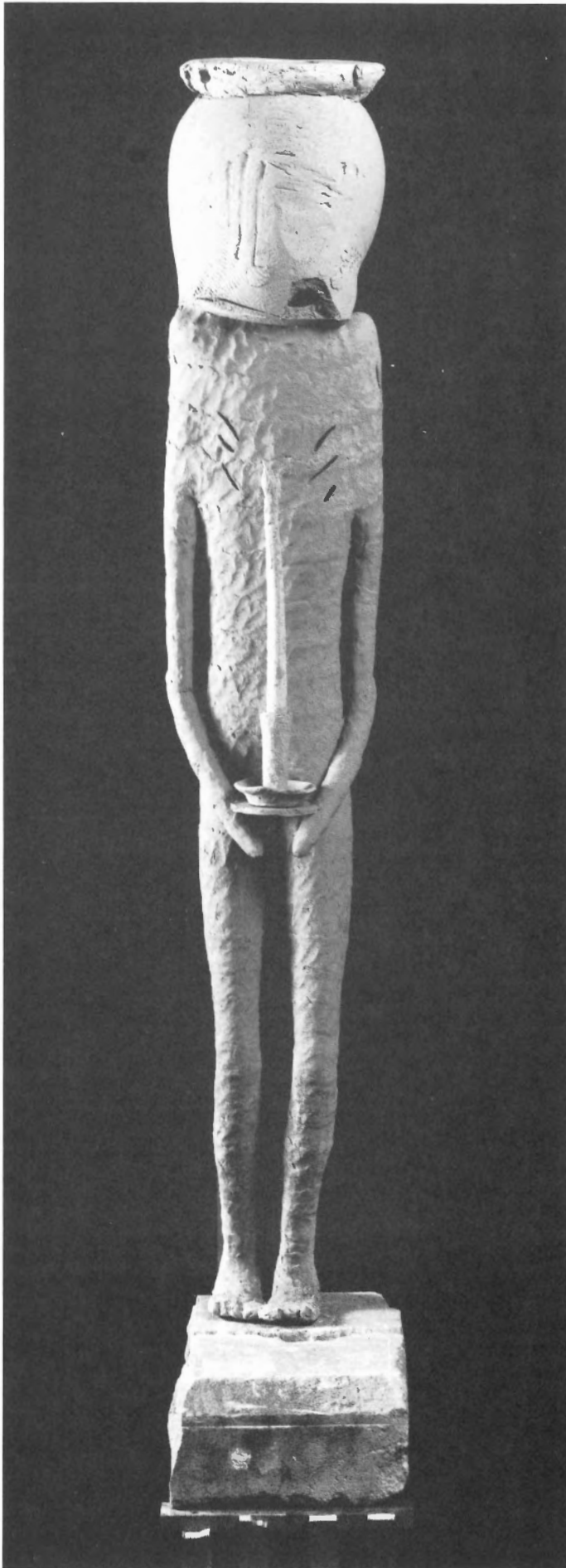
There are theories of expression that regard art as a "language of emotions," a language able to express the subjectively experienced qualities of emotions that cannot be conveyed by ordinary language. How artists are able to communicate these emotions, theorists do not agree. Answers range from intuition, projection, symbolization, or embodiment of a preëxisting emotion, to the construction of a new art object that inherently contains the feeling or experience.⁶

However such expressions are conveyed, it is certain that the figure has been a direct carrier of the artist's emotional message. The familiar connotations of the figure can be easily altered, manipulated, or distorted to confront or engage the observer. Many contemporary artists, for example, have chosen the figure to deliver a provocative emotional charge, demanding participation from the viewer. These figures may be restless, aggressive, even violent; they powerfully communicate their alienation, disillusionment, or discomfort.

The return to representational imagery has generated, along with much criticism and discussion, a tremendous recovery of energy for painting. The same can be said for sculpture in clay, the medium which has always been well suited for plastic representation and expression.

The nuclear issue, the implication of the holocaust, and the final solution to all mankind—that's a serious issue. I would hope that I could also have some of my natural humor get into that . . . it allows me a natural way to work. But humor is a problem, it's a great problem in art. The Greeks could deal with it. The two senses of drama were humor and tragedy: The humor was real raw; the tragedy was very basic. Something has happened since the time of the Greeks; it seems like humor has become threatening or debasing. Whenever you get involved with humor, people take it personally and they become offended. But you can't not offend anyone in dealing with tragedy. I find that an interesting question. I'm willing to do it, and I take a lot of horseshit from the critics for doing it. Yes, it's sophomoric. But I'm not sure much of our young culture isn't sophomoric. Should I be beyond that?—Robert Arneson

My figures tend to be about humanism more than anything else. I kind of have a world outlook—a basic concern that we can cut across political or sociological lines. Pottery did that for me: The fact that you could look at a pot that was made five thousand years ago and understand that your hand would fit in the same place that the potter's hand who made it would fit. . . . It really connects you to that person across time and space, and I think it does it contemporarily. So if you look at the head of a man—the way it's juxtaposed with something else, or a particular attitude or expression of the figure—there's a concern in the work that says, we're all in this together.—Joe Bova



I've never set out to say, "Well, I think I could really stimulate a viewer by making this grotesque face, or making it about death." I never think that, that's just the way I make them. I'm just like a little kid who likes to make weird faces or who likes to draw monsters. Kids don't think of them as ultimately scary—they just get a kick out of them.

I try to express the range of emotions—from humor to joy, fear to anxiety, loneliness, a sense of emptiness or lifelessness—but all people would focus on were the weirdest parts. They wouldn't talk about the positive things. When one has to confront oneself about an issue such as death, or pain, or sadness—it's difficult. If they see it in something, that makes them think about these things, it makes them uneasy.

—Robert Brady

I think it's a perversion of the artist's state of mind to be concerned with the audience and the reception of work. When you start getting too involved with communication, you often lose touch with the ideas. I know it's a problem when the viewer confronts incompleteness in the body. Often the response is that there's some kind of violence or accident; it speaks of a momentary event. But I'm concerned about stretching time, tying it to the past and to a future that we can only dimly know. Fragmentation is a way of establishing that bond with the earth—the earth in its transformations, as it moves from, say, a lake bed to a mountain form. If you think of this freedom to transform applied to the figure—the giving up of wholeness—you're in a position to suggest a metamorphosis to some other state. It's perhaps a hope on my part to express a transformation of the human condition.

—Stephen DeStaeblér

Things are constantly being disclosed, hidden, disclosed again. . . . Like the weather, what they call an open and shut day, where the sun shines, it rains, clouds, then sun again. I mean, things, people, and events reveal themselves, and then they seem not to be there, and hopefully they reveal themselves again, or more fully, or in a different way. That's what I like in sculpture—when you can move around something and see the different aspects.

Often when you look at a person, particularly in places where there's a low horizon—like the beach—you see a figure and the figure seems to be actually a nose, or a fingernail, or a shell. Whenever I was lying down, half asleep in the sun, and I saw someone close to me, they would be just like a Colossus, ninety feet tall. And someone not that far away could be seen through their legs, or through the arch of an elbow, as this almost invisible figure, running or walking down the shore. It is always such a powerful image for me, all those scale changes—like if you look at a mountain and then you look at a pebble.

Evolutionarily, we go through these stages . . . metamorphosis is going on all the time. I mean, we don't even have the same skin—what is it—every seven years or something. I don't want to turn into a lizard, but there are changes going on all the time—inside, outside. I find the difference between day and night still really startling.—Mary Frank

It took a long time to make the figure accessible and nonspecific, yet specific enough so that certain emotions were conveyed, and to increase the size so that they became more aggressive or had more presence. By enlarging what the eye connects with—the hand, the face—those areas become emotionally closer to the viewer: they're emphasized.

Most of the gestures are power gestures. (It would be difficult for me to want to do a pose that indicated starvation or impending death.) The idea of power is fairly obvious when you look around—in photographs, TV, and magazines. It becomes very oppressive, I think, the march of the suits. Power can be used and abused. The interest is more in the manipulation of power and the continuation of power and the averageness of all that power, than it is in the solution. The solution comes from the average person. . . . It's going to be an average person whose hand pushes the button, so to speak.—Viola Frey

My work is very controlled; the handling of the imagery is neatly done. I really enjoy taking all the care to clean them up and make them nice. What the figures are, really, is not nice, and there's a contrast between their attractiveness and the emotional states that are not attractive . . . to have cartoon imagery be the vehicle for the feelings.

Some of the figures are darker than others, some characters have to do with darker issues, like mortality. Some are defensive characters, with emotions of fear or trying to fend people off. Sometimes it's exterior forces that are creating anxiety. Whether overt or subtle, it's sort of an existential plight.—Jan Holcomb

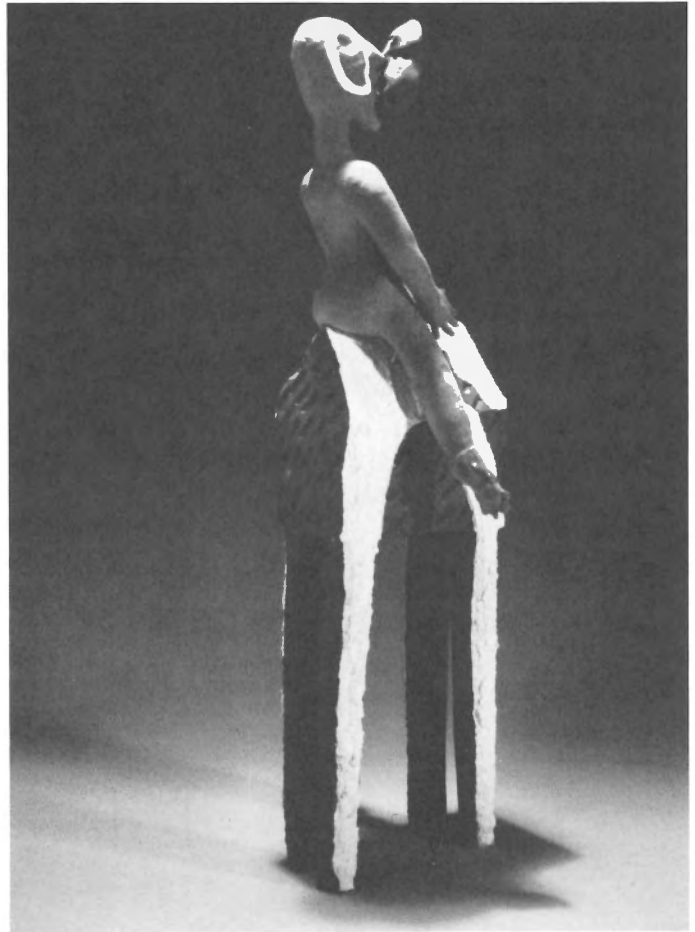
I do make my work for people to see, and I make it for the process of making it, but I make it for myself, too. When I shift to that position of the observer, then I'm just like everybody else who's looking at it, and I am interested in communicating something to people. It's not a specific thing I can pin down, but it's a certain sense of intensity about life, which includes the good things in life—the joys, the ecstasies—but also includes the angst, the terror. It's just to show the real intensity of life, of living.

For the most part, sculptures are traditionally seen as frozen gestures. But in order for there to be a sense of movement or time, there needs to be two or three forms, so you can get from one point to another. Rather than trying to choose the right portion of the gesture, I'm looking for something that vibrates, that kind of crawls like heat waves. That's essentially why I started using something like shards—to break up the static outline, to cause a breathing in and out of the space and energy around the object, to make it pulsate. I was trying to create something that had a pulsating reality—that wasn't saying, "Hello, I'm alive," in a linear sense—but was just shooting it at you—Ken Little

We as a society do not permit certain emotions to show, like anger or vulnerability. They get repressed totally, and it's seriously hurting us as people. That's why I'm making work that deals with feelings that make people uncomfortable. The work has to force people to look at things they're afraid of in themselves. It has to grab people in such a direct and personal way, that they can't walk away from it. That's why using the figure is so important. I don't want someone to walk past and say, "That has nothing to do with me."—Judy Moonelis

1. Robert Hughes, "There's No Geist like the Zeitgeist," *New York Review of Books*, October 27, 1983, p. 63.
2. Sidney Tillim, "The Reception of Figurative Art," *Artforum*, February 1969, p. 30.
3. Kenneth Clark, *The Nude* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1956), p. 249.
4. H. W. Janson, *History of Art* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963) p. 23.
5. Paul Shimmel, introduction, *American Narrative/Story Art: 1967-1977*, (Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum, 1977), p. 6.
6. See Harold Osborne, *Aesthetics and Art Theory* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970), pp. 226-51.

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Opposite page: Blackout (1981) by Robert Brady, 74" (188 cm) high. Collection Mr. and Mrs. Ross Turk, Elkhart, Indiana. Photo: Echols Photographers.

Little Horse House Rider (1983) by Christine Federighi, 23" (58.4 cm) high.

Garden Tiger Dreamer by Michael Lucero, 33.5" × 18" × 21" (85 × 45.7 × 53.3 cm). Collection of Harold and Gale Kurtz, New York. Courtesy Charles Cowles Gallery, New York. Photo: D. James Dee.



Viola Frey in the courtyard of her home in Oakland, California. Photo: M. Lee Fatherree.

Viola Frey

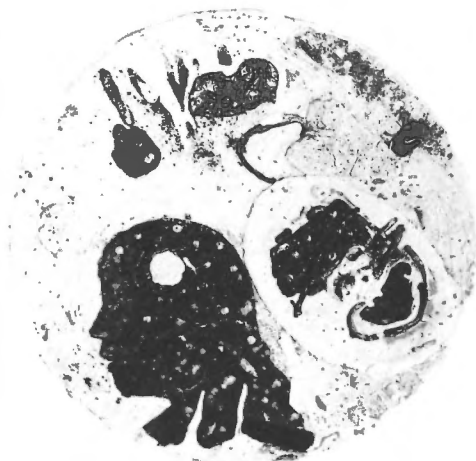
Jeff Kelley

Within the art world, and especially the segment of it that attends to ceramic sculpture, Viola Frey is known for her series of tall, brightly glazed figures. Usually, these are cartoonish "types," ranging from giant males whose color and comportment is aggressive, to equally large yet less alarming females whose timidity is birdlike, and whose hats seem like empty nests. As well, Frey makes a variety of smaller bronze figurines: faceless men with hats pulled low over their eyes, who confront each other with guns; blue-suited business men who balance on each other's shoulders; people straining to move heavy objects; single swollen hands; little women; and more. In general, they share a stiffness of posture, a stylized set of gestures, a sharp palette, and a pasty flesh. Outstretched hands, waiting glances, aggressive leans, hushed retreats, hands on hips, bent backs, lowered heads, and an overall facelessness typify Frey's people. That is, they can be read as a group, a social organism with both individual and collective personas. One senses within this weighty yet animated crowd a linguistic meta-structure that infers certain attitudes about both the predicament of humans as they publicly and privately engage each other and, as well, about the prolificacy of the artist who forces their engagement. By and large, the tone of this engagement is anonymous, a kind of habitual mindlessness with which Frey's people intersect each other, as if propelled and limited by their social roles. Here, posture becomes a statement about position, scale a metaphor for power, facelessness the stare of masks. There is in Frey's terse choreography a latent violence fixed in aggressive and submissive "moves." It's as if her figurines, both big and small, were playing a game of chess in which hostility, here recorded as a physical attitude, checkmates the fragility of one who is afraid.

There is an irony here. Of figures, one thinks of Rococo preciousness, of set-apart statuette delicacy, of embellishment. But Frey sees the figurine—and all her porcelain plates, broken doll monuments, and little curio shrines—as the junk of culture. She has a flea-market sensibility, and it seems to me that she postures her art, and indeed markets its spirit, as litter. There is something exaggerated, almost capricious, about her sense of scale and color, the mechanistic, rickety gestures of her figures, the "modeled and incised"¹ glazes and paints, and the sheer number of pieces (of all kinds) that scurry mindlessly, as if frightened, in and out of each other's way.

Fundamentally, Frey's art is about directionality; about coming and going, about moving through a crowd, and about being blocked from so doing. Even in her paintings—where Frey's ceramic motifs are often linguistically adrift in a painterly froth that too often behaves like clay—Guston-like characters enter and exit doorways, partake in a common frenzy, or, aloof and menacing, survey each other. In fact, Frey seems to take the kind of fictional liberties with her painted images that clay, in its density, disallows. It is in the paintings that her sense of frenetic disarray, of signs and symbols ducking in and out of some bizarre party, is most apparent.

For this reason, the paintings are also less to the core of Frey's art than the big ceramic figures—those slick cartoon doppelgängers whose halloween faces, icy fearfulness, and teetering aggression paralyzes, rather than indulges, what is behind the mask of appearances. Here, one can sense the social anonymity that obscures, and so reinforces, the psychological maneuvering that propels us across each other's paths. These clay persons, daubed with patches of vibrant color that imbue them with either a brittle



Self-Silhouette ca. 1969 in a Beautiful Color (1979), 25 1/2" (64.7 cm) diameter. Courtesy Quay Gallery, San Francisco.

Studio View—Figurines on Desk (1982), 40" X 60" (101.6 X 152.4 cm), alkyd oil on canvas. Courtesy Quay Gallery, San Francisco. Photo: M. Lee Fatherree.

nervousness or an opaque strength, look as if they need to move, incessantly, within a world that blocks their paths. And so they turn in on themselves, become puppets, contort, swell, advance and retreat, enter and exit. Eyes pop. Sandals pinch. Ties bulge. All in all, aggressive or passive, Frey's figures feel somehow peripherally situated in—and by—life; blown about like wadded-up want ads on Wall Street. In short, Frey's work has a lot to do with the nature of "encounters" among "types." The dissonance one feels from her figures, especially when they're grouped, is in response to their stasis—a kind of life sentence in which they remain locked in anonymity, frozen in gestures of power and fear, unable to make contact because they are so busy encountering each other. This idea of "types," pushed to its cartoon extreme, flattens out and simplifies the artist's imagery to a level of theatrical bravado that feels like the Pop of Lichtenstein on the one hand and the gumminess of Guston on the other. Cartoons and nightmares. It's an aesthetic that postures itself in appearances that are both frivolous and extreme, seductive and yet unnerving to the core. Color, of course, has a lot to do with the posturing of Frey's people. It is part of their sign language. Whether simple and blatant—a blue suit, an orange tie—or a shattered menagerie of mustard, rust, blue, green, and pink, Frey uses color as a kind of external correlate of the internal conditions of her sculptures. Their glazed and impastoed surfaces tend to sugar coat, with some irony, their deeper, heavier mass. As well, the translucency of Frey's hues are meant to be activated by the sun, in stark contrast with their lightless inner selves. Color is the surface language of Frey's bound and frenetic lexicon, for it animates what are, in fact, lifeless beings. Color, like the costumes they don, is their mask.

The final lines of the novel *Truants*, by my friend Ron Carlson, are spoken in cross-eyed panic by a fifteen-year-old boy, alone and on the edge of adulthood: "This is no place to be sitting around. I better do something."² Yes, Frey has been called prolific, which is, one suspects, a good thing for an artist to be. But I wonder if she has a choice? Busyness, it seems to me, is the synthetic characteristic of her work and, specifically, her clay figures. They are so busy as to cover for something, and the subtle violence of their maneuvering suggests a creative field in which one persona is continually displacing another. Indeed, Frey thinks of her career as a concentric outline of concerns that is essentially inclusive. As it echoes itself from her inner fears to the overscale, hulking projections of those fears, that outline feels an awful lot like society. All in all, Frey's is a club of displaced persons that's big and busy enough to include us all. Her's is no world in which to be sitting around.

1. Christopher French, "Personal Narratives," *Artweek*, April 23, 1983, p. 5.
2. Ron Carlson, *Truants*, W.W. Norton & Co., 1981, p. 255.

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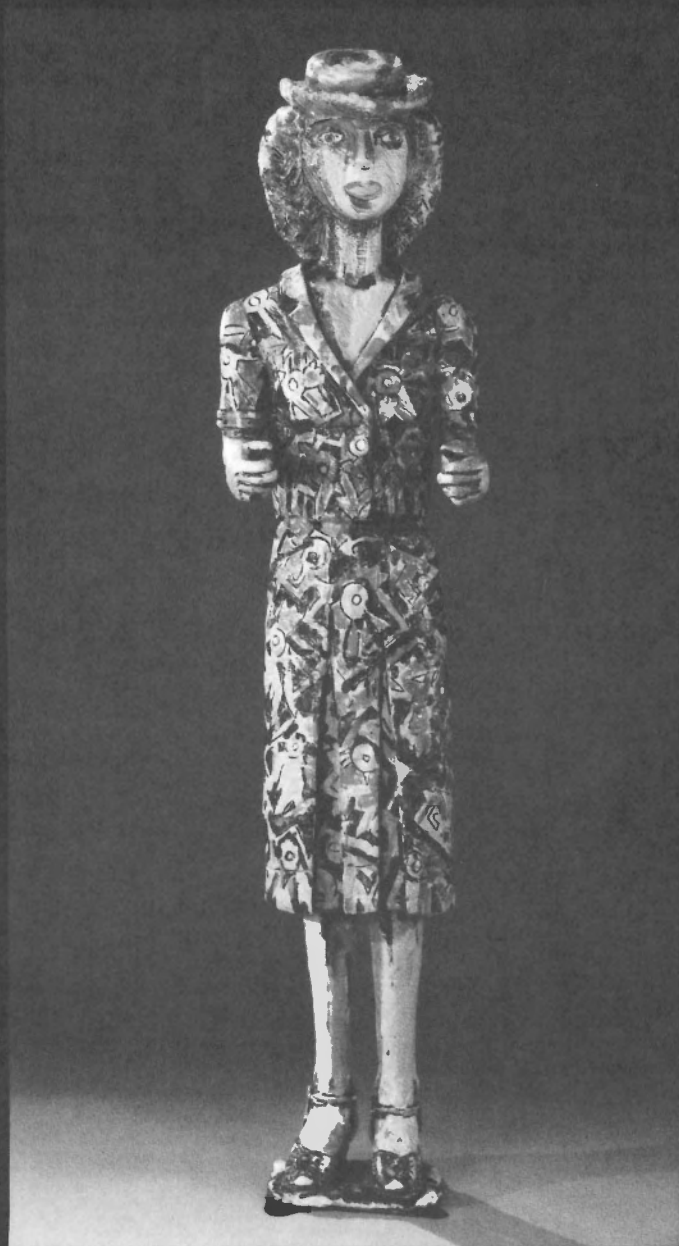


Detail: Running Figure and Candle (1983-84), 24" (61 cm) high. Courtesy Quay Gallery, San Francisco. Photo: M. Lee Fatherree.

Opposite page: Untitled (1978-83), 51" (129.5 cm) high, bronze and paint. Courtesy Quay Gallery, San Francisco. Photo: M. Lee Fatherree.







*Left: July 1, 1982 (1982), 85" (216 cm) high.
Courtesy Quay Gallery, San Francisco.
Photo: M. Lee Fatherree.*

*Right: Three figures (1982), tallest 96" (240
cm) high. Courtesy Quay Gallery, San
Francisco. Photo: M. Lee Fatherree.*



Left: Fire Suit (1982–83). 98" (248.9 cm) high. Courtesy Quay Gallery, San Francisco. Photo: M. Lee Fatherree.



Right: Grandmother with Orange Hat (1982), 72" (182.8 cm) high. Courtesy Quay Gallery, San Francisco. Photo: M. Lee Fatherree.

The Figure Emerges American Clay Sculpture: 1925-1950

Barbara Perry



Woman in Dress with Orange Sash
(ca. 1930) by Vally Wieselthier, 20" (50.8 cm)
high. Courtesy Lillian Nassau Ltd. Photo:
T.K. Rose.

*Opposite page: Jupiter and Io (1940) by
Thelma Frazier Winter. Courtesy Western
Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland.*

The years between the two World Wars, though punctuated by the Great Depression, were decisive ones for American art, and especially so for clay sculpture. It was an era of contagious excitement in all the arts, an excitement concerned with the discovery of the validity of things American, with a reevaluation of the traditional concept of the fine arts, and with the exploration of a variety of mediums.

Caught up in this excitement was a group of young ceramists who turned away from the traditional vessel format to explore clay sculpture, an art form which up until this time had been looked upon with a certain amount of disdain by ceramists and sculptors alike. A reexamination of the sculpture of such artists as Russell Barnett Aitken, Edris Eckhardt, Waylande Gregory, Viktor Schreckengost, Walter Sinz, Vally Wieselthier, and Thelma Frazier Winter may bring to light the temper of these times and its effect on artists, and reveal strengths that have been overlooked by a generation or two of modernist art historians and critics. The unique character of the period is evident in the subject matter the artists chose to illustrate in their penetrating exploration of the medium, and in their incisive wit.¹

Just as painters such as de Kooning, Gorky, and Pollock were involved in a probing of materials and purposes, so, too, were American ceramists, who had been mainly concerned with the



vessel until this time. When these young artists became aware of European attitudes and styles in ceramics—through both European exhibitions shown here in the United States and through travel and study abroad—they turned toward sculpture, but found no American tradition upon which to build. They strove for greater recognition of ceramics in general, and ceramic sculpture in particular, in the realm of the fine arts. As Thelma Frazier Winter said at the time: "Much of the thinking has been experimental, a search to find out just what ceramic sculpture should be, an effort to make it grow up as a fine art."²

It was during this period, in fact, that clay sculpture, indeed ceramics in general, came to be considered the rightful partner of painting and sculpture, just as jazz was finally being accepted as a valid musical form. When Count Basie, Duke Ellington, and George Gershwin were earning a place for their music in the realm of the arts—when Benny Goodman was bringing jazz to Carnegie Hall—ceramics was given a boost upward in stature by the establishment of a special category for clay sculpture in the prestigious Ceramic National Exhibitions organized by the Syracuse (now Everson) Museum of Fine Arts. This annual exhibition gave these ceramists a showcase for their work (they repeatedly won prizes and served on juries) and served to stimulate interest in the medium. Most important, the Ceramic

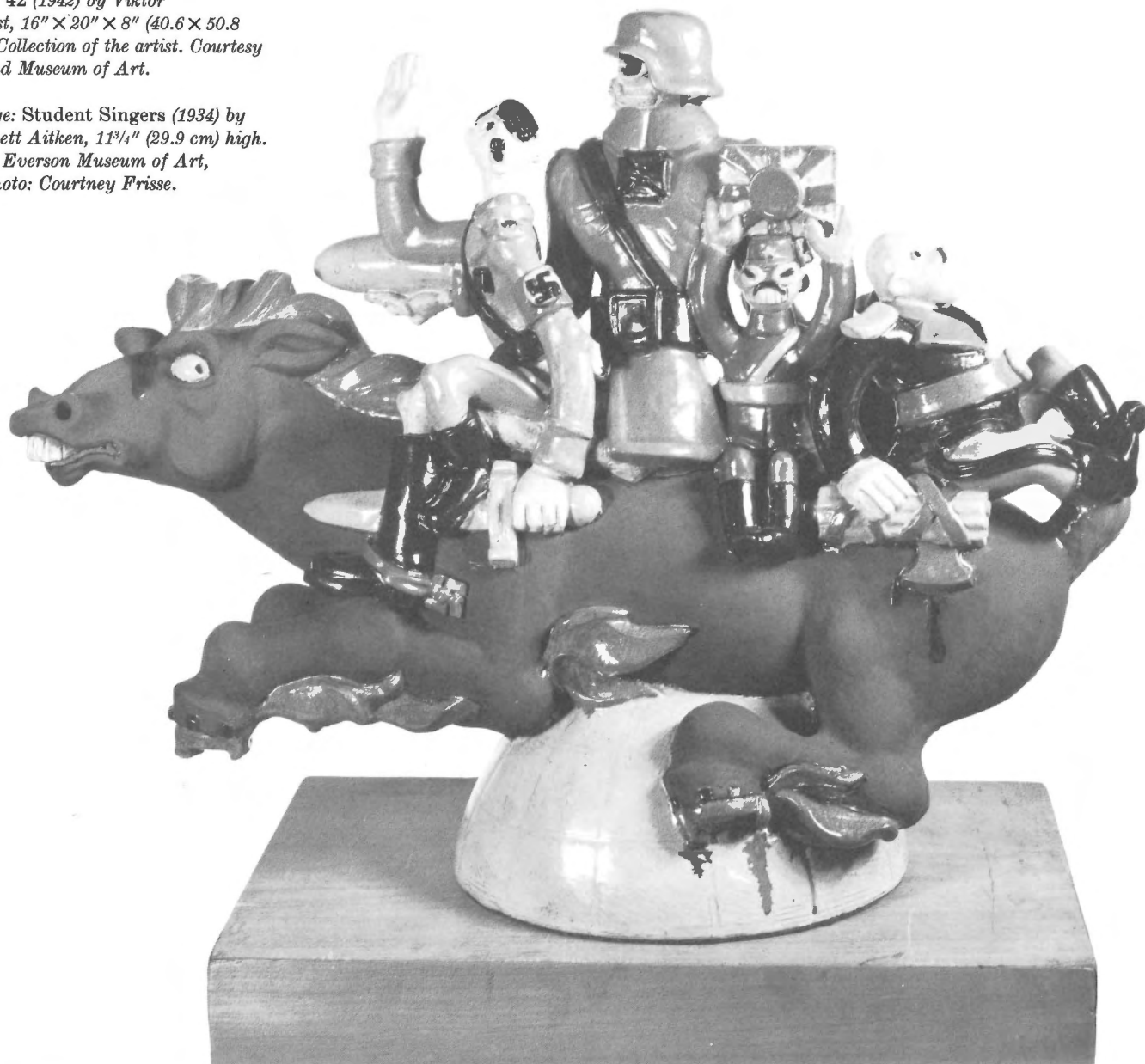
Nationals served as an occasion for ceramic sculptors to meet and see current work. The exhibitions traveled abroad as well as to museums and galleries in the United States.

Vienna proved to be an important early influence on these young ceramists. Viktor Schreckengost, who had grown up in a family of potters and was a student at the Cleveland Institute of Art, saw the works of Viennese master Michael Powolny in 1929 at the International Exposition of Decorative Art. Excited by the freshness of the modeling and the lightness of spirit he found in Powolny's work, Schreckengost sensed that here was a man who revered clay as he did, and decided he must work with him. He did so for a year at Vienna's Kunstgewerbeschule, and when he returned home to Cleveland he brought with him a whole new aesthetic.

American artists who worked in clay had always tried to hide its nature, tried to make it look like wood, marble, or bronze—anything but clay. Their products were mainly in the then-popular Neoclassic or Art Deco styles, smoothly finished, carefully glazed, and traditional in form. In Vienna, Schreckengost found ceramists who exploited the qualities of the clay instead of hiding them. They modeled their pieces freely, using a more tactile approach, and produced works that were bold, witty, and informal. The characteristics of the clay were always in evidence,

Apocalypse '42 (1942) by Viktor Schreckengost, 16" X 20" X 8" (40.6 X 50.8 X 20.3 cm). Collection of the artist. Courtesy The Cleveland Museum of Art.

Opposite page: Student Singers (1934) by Russell Barnett Aitken, 11³/₄" (29.9 cm) high. Collection of Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse. Photo: Courtney Frisse.



and it was this respect for the medium that Schreckengost found so to his liking. He passed on his enthusiasm to some of his fellow students at the Cleveland Institute: Thelma Frazier (whose future husband Edward Winter also studied in Vienna), Edris Eckhardt, Russell Barnett Aitken (who would also study in Austria and Berlin), and even to his teacher, Walter Sinz.

The arrival in the United States of Vally Wieselthier added impetus to the trend. Wieselthier brought with her the Viennese style: a reverence for clay, a willingness to experiment, a delightful humor, and a sense of purpose. In her words: "The medium has its own possibilities of expression in its own technique. . . . Ceramics, more than any art, works by experiment. . . . Every touch of the finger on the clay as it is rolled out from the kick-wheel reveals new possibilities, so plastic is the material, so vast the range of colors in which the material may be diversified."³ It was this aspect of the Viennese style—the enthusiasm and respect for the unique capabilities of the medium—that was seized upon so fruitfully by the Americans. In this respect, America's clay artists were very much in the modernist mainstream, as painters, sculptors, and architects both here and abroad had been preaching and practicing the "truth to materials" doctrine since the turn of the century. Wieselthier had studied from 1914 to 1920 at the

Kunstgewerbischule under Powolny and had worked with Joseph Hoffman at the Wiener Werkstätte, where an energetic, spontaneous atmosphere contributed to the free, whimsical quality of the clay sculpture produced there. She exhibited extensively in Europe, was given a one-person show in New York in 1929, and eventually settled permanently in the United States.

Using wheel-thrown parts to create a figure was a common method in the Austrian school. After the larger forms were assembled, they were ornamented with modeled decoration and often brilliantly colored. The effect was joyful, spirited, and completely spontaneous. Wieselthier built *Woman in Dress with Orange Sash* (ca. 1930) in this manner. Her *Taming the Unicorn* (1946) is also a hollow form, with pieces of clay added to create hair, mane, and drapery. Each part retains its identity as clay, even as it suggests another substance.

This additive technique, which we find in figurines of the eighteenth century as well, was also adopted by the Americans. Thelma Frazier Winter, for example, constructed *The Sirens* (1937–38) using the Viennese technique. Three hollow heads upon cylindrical necks have sculptural decoration added around the base and in the hair. Her source was a head by Dina Kuhn, *Das Wasser*, which she would have seen in the Cleveland Museum of Art. Frazier Winter's use of small bits of clay for details and



decoration draws attention to the texture and plasticity of the material.

Wieselthier's *Europa and the Bull* (1938) was done several years after she settled in the United States, but it still exhibits the humor and charm of the Viennese style. Europa clings to the neck of the bull, both arms and legs wrapped about the neck, and leans coyly forward on the head. The expression on the face of the bull, tongue lolling out, is delightful and deflates the customary seriousness of subjects from classical mythology.

Wieselthier's American colleagues approached mythological figures in the same way, amused rather than awed by the shenanigans of the ancient gods. While Hollywood produced *Roman Scandals* and *The Boys from Syracuse* appeared on the New York stage, Frazier Winter exhibited a droll lack of reverence for Roman dieties in her *Jupiter and Io* (1940). Jupiter grins to himself in delight as he thinks he has foiled Hera again. He sits atop Io, here a cuddly cow, and summons with his left hand the figure of Night, who will pull a dark cloud over the earth to hide the couple from the jealous Hera. Russell Barnett Aitken spoofed the taming of the unicorn myth by placing a child with a lollipop in place of the lovely damsel.

Viktor Schreckengost's wit became at times more barbed. Following a visit to Europe in 1937, he produced his *Dictator*

(1939), a piece that warned, if humorously, of the specter of fascism he had seen there. The dictator, in the guise of a portly Nero, sits strumming his lyre atop a throne. Scampering about him are playful putti, but these chubby cherubs have the visages of Hirohito, Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin. The British lion lies asleep at his feet.

A few months after Pearl Harbor, Schreckengost again depicted the Axis powers, this time atop a wildly racing mare ridden by a figure of Death wearing the uniform of the German army and holding a bomb. These four figures parody the four horsemen of the Apocalypse described in the book of Revelation. "I've always felt that you can say more with one vivid cartoon," says Schreckengost, "than you can with a lot of heavy words."⁴ Though the other Cleveland artists did not hesitate to satirize the ancients, Schreckengost was the only one to turn his stinging satire to the contemporary political scene.

Russell Barnett Aitken took on the contemporary art scene when he did *Futility of a Well-Ordered Life*, a burlesque of a painting by Salvador Dali. Aitken admired the paintings of Dali, who had just arrived in New York, but tired of the publicity which accompanied him. He created a parody in clay of a portrait by the Spanish painter, which Aitken termed "a bit of surrealism to end all surrealism." The piece is Viennese in style, loosely modeled



with applied decoration and an elongated body.

Music was important on the American scene during this time: the Cotton Club drew jazz lovers (including the young Schreckengost), Gershwin produced *Porgy and Bess*, and radio brought not only popular music, but opera and the classics to an ever larger section of the public. Frazier Winter sculpted *Marguerita and the Jewels* (1937)—inspired by Gounod's opera, *Faust*—and *Peter and the Wolf* and *Scheherazade*. Schreckengost, who tells of his love for spirituals and the music of black choirs, created *Glory, Glory* (1937), *Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego* (1938), from a popular song of the thirties, and *Rhythm of the Soil* (1947), all characterizing black musicians. Aitken recalled his student days in Vienna in *Student Singers* (1934), who belt out their song while holding frothy mugs of beer. They are dressed in the uniforms of the Corps Hilaritas, an Austrian dueling society of which Aitken was made an honorary member. The lightheartedness of the figures belies the masterful, compact composition.

Movies and the Broadway theater enjoyed great popularity during the Depression: the Marx Brothers appeared in *A Night at the Opera*; George Balanchine choreographed *On Your Toes*; musical revues appeared on Broadway; and Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, and the Gershwins wrote some of their most popular music.

It might seem surprising that so much of the clay sculpture of this period is lighthearted, witty, and whimsical, since it was produced during the depths of the Depression. But clay artists, like musicians, song writers, and Hollywood directors, sought to lift the public's spirit and divert their attention from economic woes. Enlivened by the gaiety expressed by the Viennese, American ceramists also believed that the viewer should "feel as happy as the artist when he made it: he should laugh with the artist."⁵ Ceramic sculpture, with its lighthearted, spirited flavor, reflected this attitude. Just as they had dealt with the classics with amusement, these artists also turned their attention to the entertainer, the performer himself. Though Schreckengost called his piece *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego*, he was actually portraying the singers of the song. Sinz portrayed the singer Ted Lewis in *Me and My Shadow* (1945), and the clown is the central theme in the work of Eckhardt, though she turned the motif into something intensely personal.

When Carl Walters used the human figure, he almost invariably placed it within the context of the entertainment world, mainly the circus. His *Ella* (1937), in the Museum of Modern Art, is a carefully wrought figure much in the style of those done later by Elie Nadelman, a friend of Walters. He did a series of figures-in-cabinet also using circus themes, with figures set within



Opposite page: *Cat* (1938) by Carl Walters, 23" (58.4 cm) long. Collection of Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse. Photo: Courtney Frisse.

The Juggler (1949) by Thelma Frazier Winter, 19 1/4" (48.9 cm) high. Collection of Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse. Photo: Courtney Frisse.

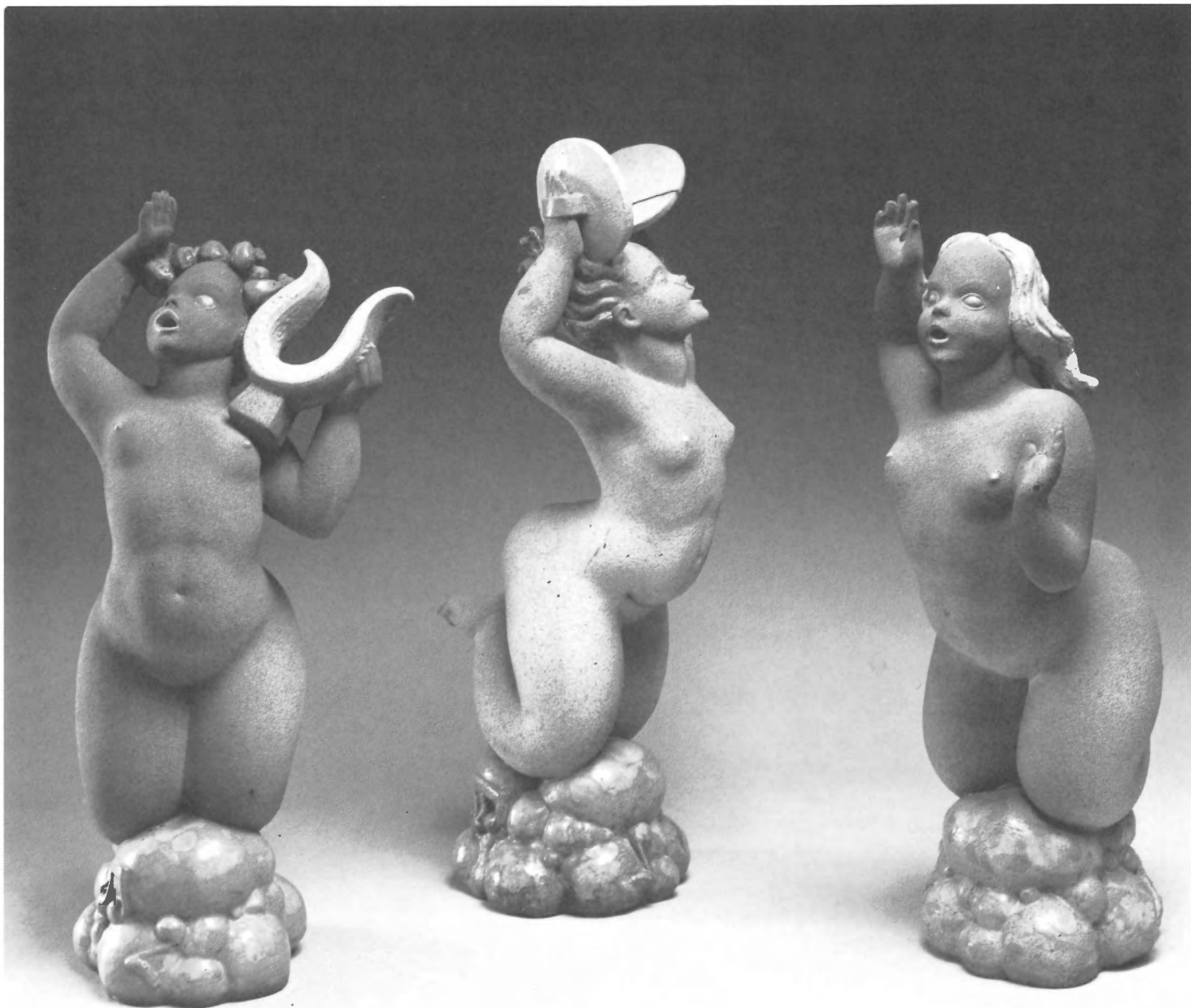
a shallow slab-built box or cabinet. Simply conceived and often shaped from coils, they recall medieval wooden or clay sculptures of similar size and treatment.

Frazier Winter's *Performers* and *Juggler* (1949) seem about to burst forth in an exuberant display of mirth. Their colors, soft and sparsely applied, are similar to those of polychrome medieval sculpture; their rectangular shape suggests the stone block so evident in Romanesque sculptures that have been removed from their original site. The figures appear in the guise of medieval jesters, with ass's ears and bells attached to their headgear. That clay sculpture should enjoy a florescence during this particular period reflects an interest in the figure specifically and realism generally, which came in the wake of the Depression. The American Scene painters looked to the frequenters of Coney Island, the inhabitants of the American Midwest, and the circus for their subjects. Chaim Gross carved acrobats, children at play, and family groupings, while John Flannagan created animal forms in stone that recall the work of Carl Walters. William Zorach abandoned abstraction for more traditional themes involving the figure, which he carved directly from the stone. These sculptors exploited the inherent characteristics of wood, stone, and metal in the same direct way that ceramists worked with clay.

The figurative sculpture of Waylande Gregory is unique for its great size alone; his figures for the *Fountain of the Atom*, commissioned for the 1939 New York World's Fair, are among the largest made in modern times. He invented new methods as the size of his work demanded. Some of his large figures, such as *The Seed*, are reminiscent of those of Zorach.

Gregory interpreted the theme of the *Fountain of the Atom* in humanistic terms. The atom's "nucleus" is represented by four large figures signifying the four elements: *Earth*, a woman atop a cluster of rock crystals; *Fire*, a woman emerging from a swirl of flames; *Air*, a winged man; and *Water*, a swimmer plunging through the waves. These figures are surrounded by eight "electrons," smaller figures tumbling and dancing about, enlivened by sculptural bolts of lightning.

Much of the clay sculpture of this period is colorful, intimately personal, and illustrative of its process. It would become even more so a few decades later. These tendencies were to reemerge, refreshed and renewed in the late sixties and seventies in the work of such sculptors as Robert Arneson, Mary Frank, Viola Frey, and David Gilhooly. This is not to say that the influences of the earlier ceramists was direct, but rather to point out that although their statements may differ, both used clay in a self-descriptive way. The material remains a distinct and intrinsic part of the concept



of the work, rather than having all signs of its fundamental nature obliterated. The earlier works also forecast the humor of some contemporary ceramists, though there is none of the biting sarcasm or overt eroticism of Funk art.

These early ceramists, then, participated in what may now be seen as the establishment of a particular tradition in American clay sculpture. Their respect for the special qualities of the medium brought them into the mainstream of modern art, where the work of other artists was also shaped by the mediums in which they worked. They were cognizant of their role in the affirmation of the medium, though their humor and satire sometimes masked the seriousness of their intent.

1. A recent exhibition mounted by the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York, "The Diversions of Keramos; American Clay Sculpture 1925-1950," documents for the first time this emergence of an American school of clay sculpture and the establishment of what has become an American tradition in the medium. The exhibit also reintroduces a number of artists whose work has lain hidden in museum storage bins and warehouses for decades. The exhibition, curated by Ross Anderson and the author, was on view at the Everson (September 9-November 17, 1983) and at the New Jersey State Museum, Trenton (February 18-April 15, 1984). A

ninety-eight page catalogue is available at twelve dollars.

2. Ernest W. Watson. "The Ceramic Sculpture of Thelma Frazier Winter," *American Artist*, May 1958, p. 52.

3. Vally Wieselthier, "Ceramics," *Design*, vol. 31 no. 6 (November 1929), pp. 101-102.

4. Carmie Amata, "An Artist Catches the Essence of an Era," *The Cleveland Plain Dealer Magazine*, August 14, 1983, p. 52.

5. Wieselthier, "Ceramics," p. 101.

Barbara Perry is co-curator of "The Diversions of Keramos" and professor of art history, LeMoyne College, Syracuse, New York.

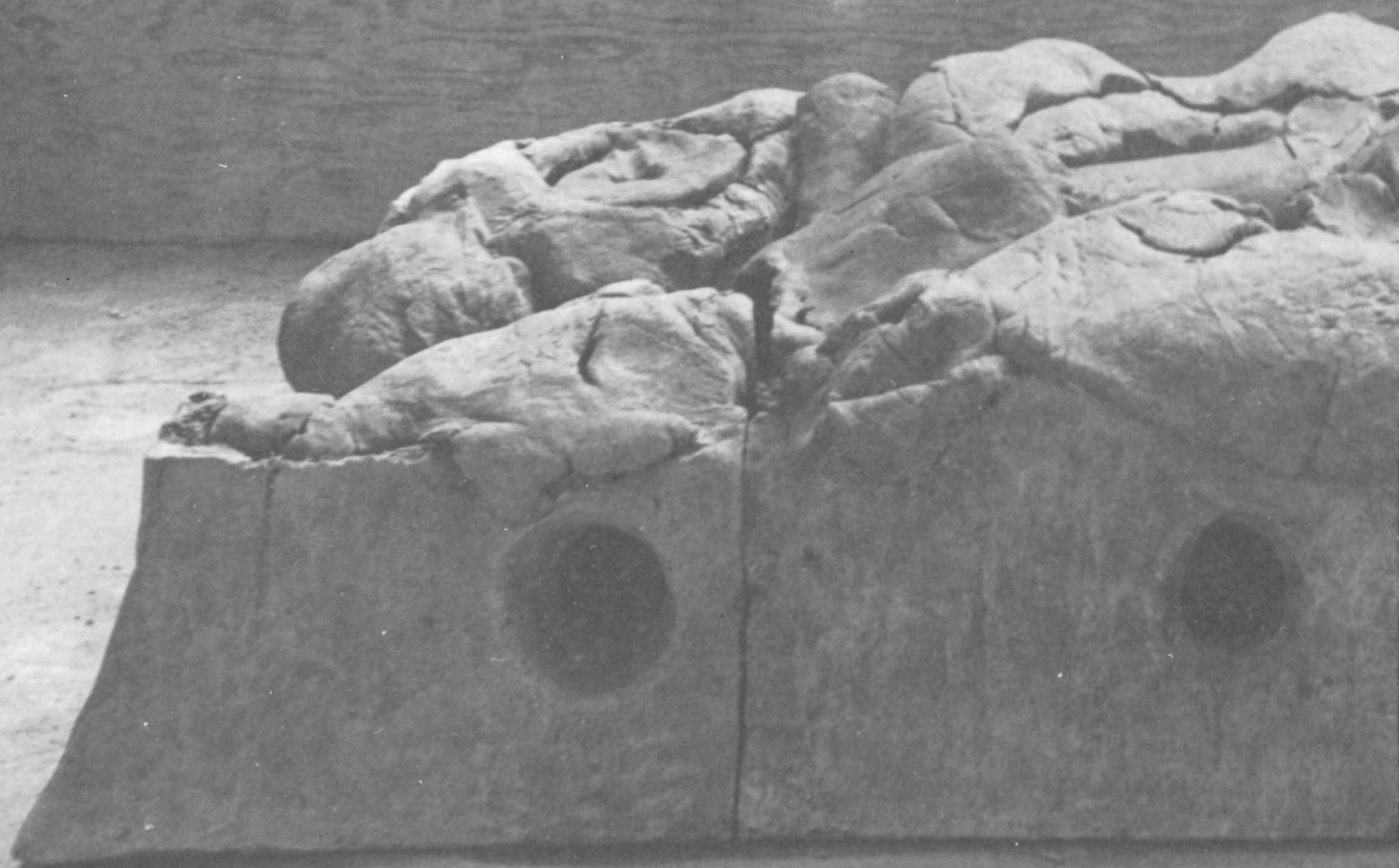
Music: Little Nude Girl with Harp, with Cymbals, with Clapping Hands (n.d.) by Waylande deSantis Gregory. On loan to Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, from the estate of Yolande Gregory. Photo: Courtney Frisse.

Opposite page: Water from The Fountain of Atoms (1939) by Waylande deSantis Gregory, 72" (182.8 cm) high. Promised gift to Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, from the estate of Yolande Gregory. Photo: Bob Pike.

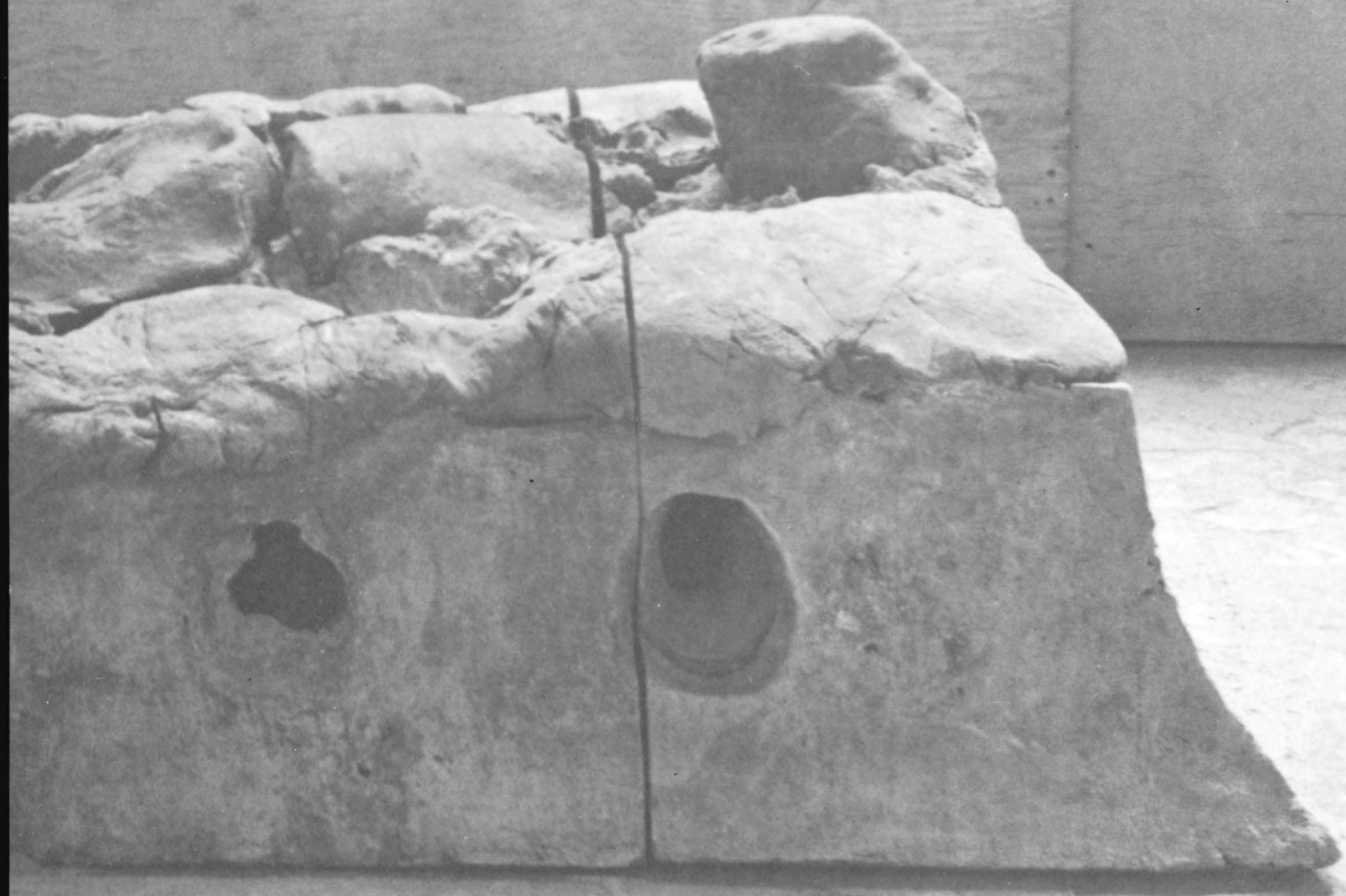


Stephen DeStaebler

Joanne Burstein



A Man (1964), 20" × 39" × 71"
(50.8 × 99 × 180.3 cm).





For two decades Stephen DeStaeblér has been assembling monumental clay figures—plastercast body fragments embedded in blocks of clay—expressing the tension between an image not fully distinguished from its ground and one simultaneously returning to its element. These works combine the immediacy of raw clay, realistic figurative detail, gestural cuts, and lyrical pastel coloration. Here, landscape and figure, painting and sculpture, geologic and sidereal time find a natural harmony.

By fragmenting his figures, DeStaeblér places them squarely within the four-dimensional space of Cubism. But because the pieces are human scale, because we expect their bodies to correspond to ours, one-to-one, it often takes an act of will to see how much of theirs is missing or “misplaced.” DeStaeblér presents the human form as he feels it is experienced, a thing glimpsed in fragments, in *coups de l’œil* (in “blows to the eye” or glances), whose only completed form is an ideal one in our mind.

DeStaeblér’s mature work visually expresses his felt experience of perception: perception as a serial process of small moments and glimpses. The eye, following instinct, is attracted to and notes detail by its own internal logic, but never really sees the whole. The mind recognizes and acknowledges the whole as complete, although we never completely “know” the totality of our immediate reality, just as we are never fully aware of the totality of anything we perceive.

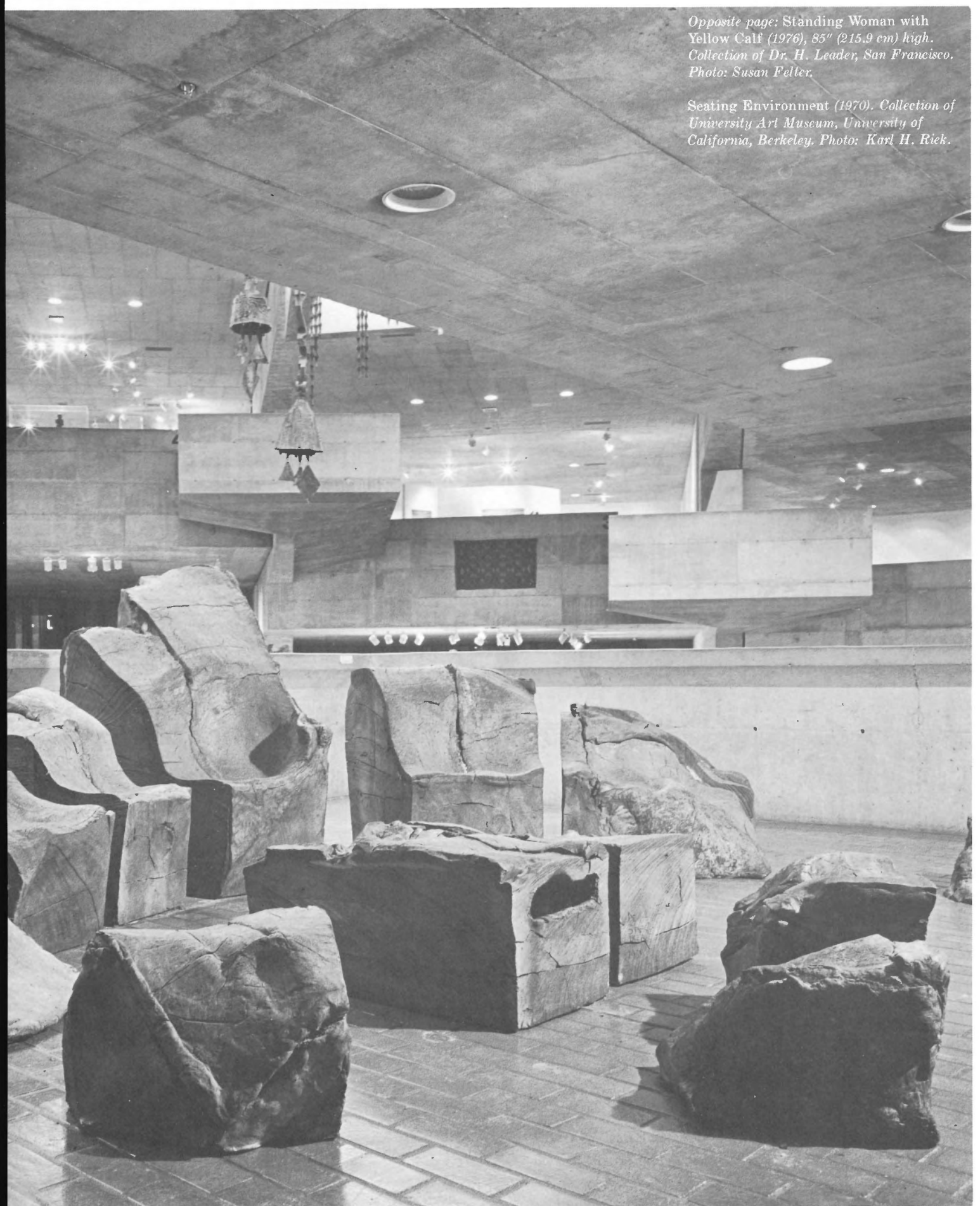
Struggling against a strongly academic background in art history and religion, DeStaeblér made repeated attempts to follow his art impulses. As a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, DeStaeblér took a required art course with Peter Voulkos in 1960. He felt immediately comfortable with the medium of clay and with the physical theater of the studio environment. Confronting the mountain of clay at the far end of the studio, “I did my best to make it noticeably smaller,” he recalls, “and it was a long time before I realized clay came in less impressive quantities.” DeStaeblér cites Voulkos’s dedication and his belief that “anything can be done” as seminal to his own experimentation and discovery of clay’s possibilities.

DeStaeblér found this “no rules” environment demanded close observation of what the clay was really doing. It was here that he began consciously noticing the “events along the way to the finished work,” here that he discovered it was important to attend to “the energy in the act” in order to keep that energy present in the finished piece. With the desire to focus on each aspect of making the work came a commitment to retain the evidence of those forces at work. In this way, he believes, the hand and body are made an invisible part of the art, an unsynthesized presence.



Opposite page: Standing Woman with Yellow Calf (1976), 85" (215.9 cm) high. Collection of Dr. H. Leader, San Francisco. Photo: Susan Felter.

Seating Environment (1970). Collection of University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley. Photo: Karl H. Riek.



Pink-Stripe Face (1975), 6 1/2" (16.5 cm) high.
Photo: Susan Felter.



In the same way that Jackson Pollock's body was said to have been "inside" his paintings, so is DeStaeblér's body imbedded in his sculptures. Not only is the surface marked with the imprint of his hands, knuckles, and fingers, but with the dents of the blows and shoves necessary to manipulate the large masses of clay. In this way he literally demonstrates his belief that, for a truly expressed creative act, the idea or intent is never separate from the act itself. He often finds himself remembering Ben Shahn's admonition, given him at Black Mountain College: "You are your own performer." For DeStaeblér, "the performance, the process of making anything—and most certainly art—is the art. The resulting object commemorates the event."

DeStaeblér extends this physical involvement in the process of creating to the clay itself. He attributes certain emotional states corresponding to the various physical states of clay: its plasticity when wet, its strength when leather hard, its fragility when dry, and its tendency to warp and crack during firing. By exploiting each of these qualities, he has developed his own expressive vocabulary in clay. It is the subjective rapport with these qualities, described by him as "emotional," which enables him to build his pieces on such large scale.

For DeStaeblér, clay's tendency to record pressure and lines of force correspond to the geological shifts of the earth's crust. When he began working in clay, he created huge slab landscapes to explore these correspondences. "I was extremely anxious to give some greater context to the human condition that we find ourselves in. And one way to do that is to play on these allusions to landscape. Because the earth abides . . . and at no time in man's history has that thought been more poignant."¹

From his first large architectural installation in 1963, and through the sixties, DeStaeblér repeatedly sought to express the landscape/figure he felt was there in the clay. In *A Man* (1964), the first expressionistic figure emerges from the earthlike pedestal in much the same way we glimpse faces in mountainsides or figures in clouds. In his *Seating Environment* (1970) for the University Art Museum, Berkeley, California, his involvement with the unity of landscape and clay had reached a mature point: a landscape of thrones and stools literally enfolds and holds the living figure, while simultaneously reading as a small mountain range.

At this point, the horizontal concerns of geological layering gave way to a desire for a successful vertical solution to the figure. This, of course, meant "getting the clay to stand up" to eight- and nine-foot heights. Several years and a hillside full of failed experiments finally yielded the right balance of forces and timing that allowed

the monolithic figures to stand.

In *Standing Woman with Yellow Calf* (1976), the stacked sections are dominated by the figure's vertical presence; although clearly not freestanding, its ambiguous emergence from the vertical plane creates a tension similar to that of Michelangelo's half-completed marble *Captives*. Our mind is tempted to see the figure in movement, while the columnar architectural context denies this possibility. Movement is also suggested by the rhythmic tiers of stacked components. The ambivalence of movement/stasis, emerging/sinking, freezes the sculpture at the moment of becoming. It is fully present in its being, as the existentialists would say, yet still possessing the potential for an undefinable future existence.

After mastering the standing figure, DeStaeblér increasingly sought to narrow its base of physical support. He found the allusion to the earth/landscape origins of the figure needed less and less specific expression. In *Right-Sided Woman Standing* (1979), the architectural context has fallen away almost completely; the landscape is suggested, but does not enfold the figure. The clay block pedestal, the figurative elements, and the traces of landscape form a three-way dialogue. In this, as in all DeStaeblér's works, colored oxides are washed over and pounded into the clay, softening and accenting the austere stoneware surface.

The visual sweep of the work from the late seventies to the present has continued upward. Most of the clay block foundations form a "horizon" on which the figures stand. The embracing clay landscape around the figure seemingly changes in appearance from broken stone to molten lava to flesh. The hand impressions of the maker mingle with the cutting wire lines and the push and shove marks, leaving a clear record of all aspects of the making. These later works, not as obviously architectural as the earlier pieces, still stand as totems: the human form as pillar, the human being as central to a world view.

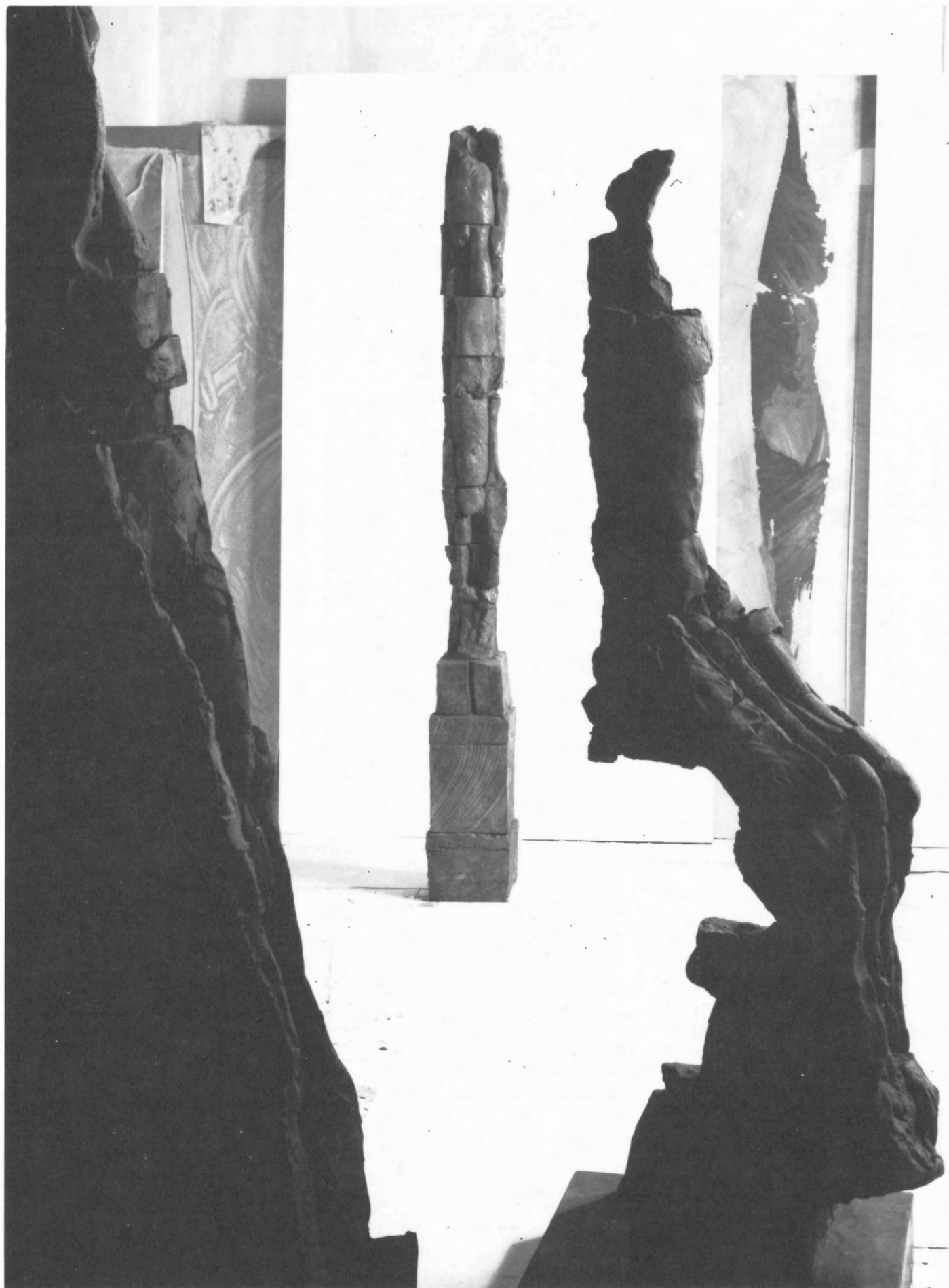
In recent years, DeStaeblér has cast large bronze works that he constructs from the shards of previous sculptures, which had failed for technical reasons. The bronze casting process allows DeStaeblér to realize and expand on some figurative concepts that were antithetical to clay's structural properties, and also allows him to work in series. Although color has always been an important aspect of the image to DeStaeblér, the bronze castings enable him to paint several casts of the same image in different ways.

The paired, seated figures, such as *Seated Woman Bisected* and *Seated Man Bisected* (1981), show the subtle changes caused by the translation from clay to bronze. These figures do not emerge from solid blocks so much as they sit upon them—cantilevered in side view, yet still monumentally

massive from the front. Their figurative detailing is closer to representational reality than in any of the clay works. Here, however, skeletal elements are juxtaposed with life-cast elements, causing us to question what is internal and what is external in the human form. Similarly, the throne like seat is cut away in the back, revealing the actual hollowness of the bronze, belied by its external appearance. As he has done with clay in the past, DeStaeblér makes the viewer aware of the physical properties of the bronze process. While the bronze works do not have the same archaeological associations of the clay figures, which we generally read as ancient figures unearthed, all the work carries a metaphysical charge. The human figure flows from right side to left side, inside to outside, process to permanence, abstraction to realism. By fusing such opposing forces, DeStaeblér's imagery expresses a cubism of the heart, not the cerebral cubism of the eye. Man and woman, hard and soft, art and nature—all exist separately, yet inseparably. Above all, the tactile surfaces of his work strike an emotional chord, not an analytic one, as we see the whole destroyed and reassembled with honor. These are the dichotomies of reverence in an age without religion.

1. Ted Lindberg, *Stephen DeStaeblér* (Vancouver, Canada: Emily Carr College of Art and Design, 1983), p. 8.

Joanne Burstein, a frequent contributor to *American Ceramics and Artweek*, is currently in Europe investigating contemporary art.

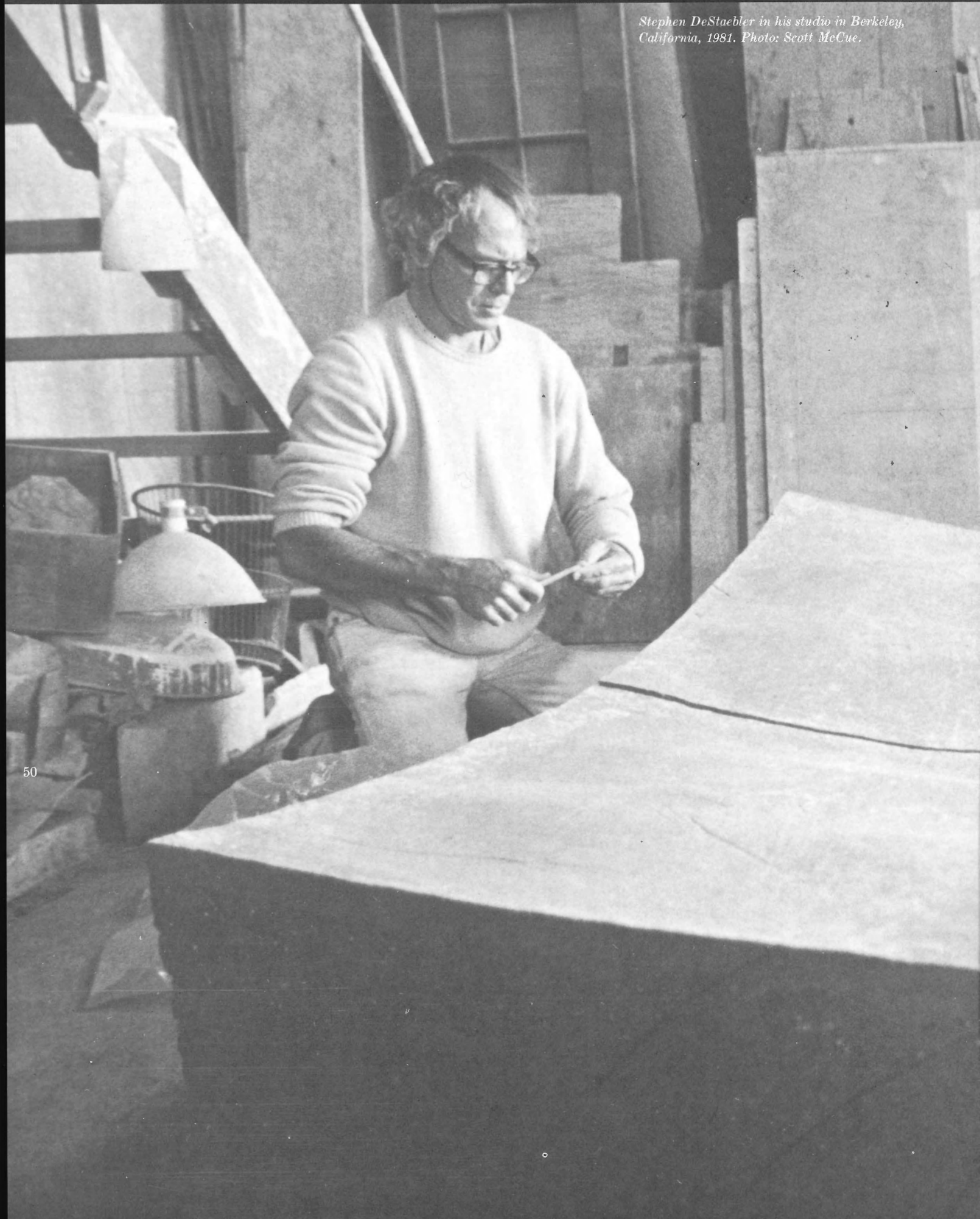




Opposite page, center and right: Twisting Figure Column (1981), 77" (195.5 cm) high, cast bronze; Seated Woman Bisected (1981), 70" (177.8 cm) high, cast bronze. Photo: Scott McCue.

Right-Sided Woman Standing (1979), 90½" (229.8 cm) high. Photo: Scott McCue.

*Stephen DeStaebler in his studio in Berkeley,
California, 1981. Photo: Scott McCue.*







Patrick Siler

Arthur Okazaki



Patrick Siler in his studio, 1983. Photo: Arthur Okazaki.

Woman Throwing (1982), 13" (33 cm) high. Photo: Arthur Okazaki.

Patrick Siler likes to make and eat a palate-searing version of red chili he calls "hot red": just chiles, tomatoes, and beef, simmered for hours in a capacious campfire Dutch oven whose tripod legs are sawed off. It would be easy to suggest a parallel between his chili—both process and product—and his ceramics. In fact, it's not only easy; it's true. The relationship between art and life (and, presumably, between ceramics and chili) has been described as everything from an intimate interaction to a barrier between mutually exclusive entities. Rauschenberg liked to talk about "working in the gap between art and life." Siler goes beyond this daily toiling; his art and life intermingle with "hot red" richness and piquancy.

At the Berkeley campus of the University of California during the early sixties, Peter Voulkos was an inescapable and potent presence in sculptural mediums. Nonobjective painting in the expressionist-derived vein was the two-dimensional mainstream. Words like "spatial," "formal," and "plasticity" were daily studio incantations; Abstract Expressionism was the dogma. Beginning as a painting and drawing major, Siler was lured into this expressionistic orbit, and only by chance was he brought into the pot shop.

There he did large slab and thrown pieces in the idiom then defined by Voulkos. Others like Jun Kaneko and Henry Takemoto were also working in ceramic sculpture, and given Siler's curiosity and receptive attitude at that time, he was in addition drawn to the pre-Funk work of Michael Frimkiss, who was making household and industrial objects out of clay. Frimkiss never attempted to create illusionistic surfaces or imitative details, preferring to respect and maintain the reality of clay. Siler merged the impulse to deal with ceramics in a sculptural way with the desire to make objects out of clay. A six hundred-pound ceramic radio is a weighty memory of that period when the possibilities of combining imagery and clay forms first emerged for him.

Consumed by an intense interest in clay and the lore of ceramics, Siler paid homage to the traditional Japanese and Korean masters, and especially to their grittier and "tougher" (as he calls them) high-fire pots. He studied Momoyama and early Edo period tea wares from the Mino kilns. Names in a book, like Shino, Oribe, and

Karatsu, materialized as objects of veneration and inspiration—not as models to imitate, but as a collective impetus to make pots and work with clay. Another process of Oriental origin—layering or "marbling" colored clay—extended the variety of his clay-building skills. Beneath the details of execution lay the desire to make things; the acts of ceramic forming and firing became an ascendant passion. Siler's back yard was littered with forgotten and abandoned products that were of little sustained interest to him, once finished.

Superimposed on the earlier image-plus-clay combination was something new for Siler: the use of paper stencils to create images. This process was employed in Sung dynasty China. More recently, Voulkos had stenciled figures onto cylindrical forms in the fifties, and Paul Soldner has used the method extensively in his raku work. Stenciling became, in Siler's hands, a formidable creative and procedural touchstone. His roots in painting and drawing, the expressionist influence with its gestural rawness and directness, the manipulative joy of forming and firing clay, the leitmotif of some kind of imagery—all this coalesced into highly personal statements that were unified and animated by the stencil technique.

Important as the paper cutouts became, Siler also explored other ways of getting a picture onto clay. During the years 1973 to 1975, he used a black inklike medium of ceramic pigment and water brushed directly onto a ceramic surface, and he used ceramic pencils with similar directness. Sgraffito, an intaglio process, was another image-making alternative. Siler extended this linear cutting action to create relief images by slicing into the clay surface with broad strokes.

Relief images: Siler was attracted to their palpable aspect, the feel of ragged, flinty edges, the sharp borders, and especially the real depth. By combining stencils and yet another way to get a picture onto clay—slip—the desirable visual and tangible features of reliefs merged with Siler's gestural aesthetic. His way of slip painting is a two-layered process: an opaque, dark underslip of consistent value is first applied, then with paper stencils in place, a light-toned overslip is more freely brushed on (recently he has been experimenting with colored overslips). The stencils are removed after the slip dries,



Bow-wow (1976), 14" (35.5 cm) diameter.
Photo: Arthur Okazaki.

Opposite page: Setting the Kiln (1982),
19 1/2" x 28" x 3" (49.5 x 71 x 7.6 cm). Photo:
Arthur Okazaki.

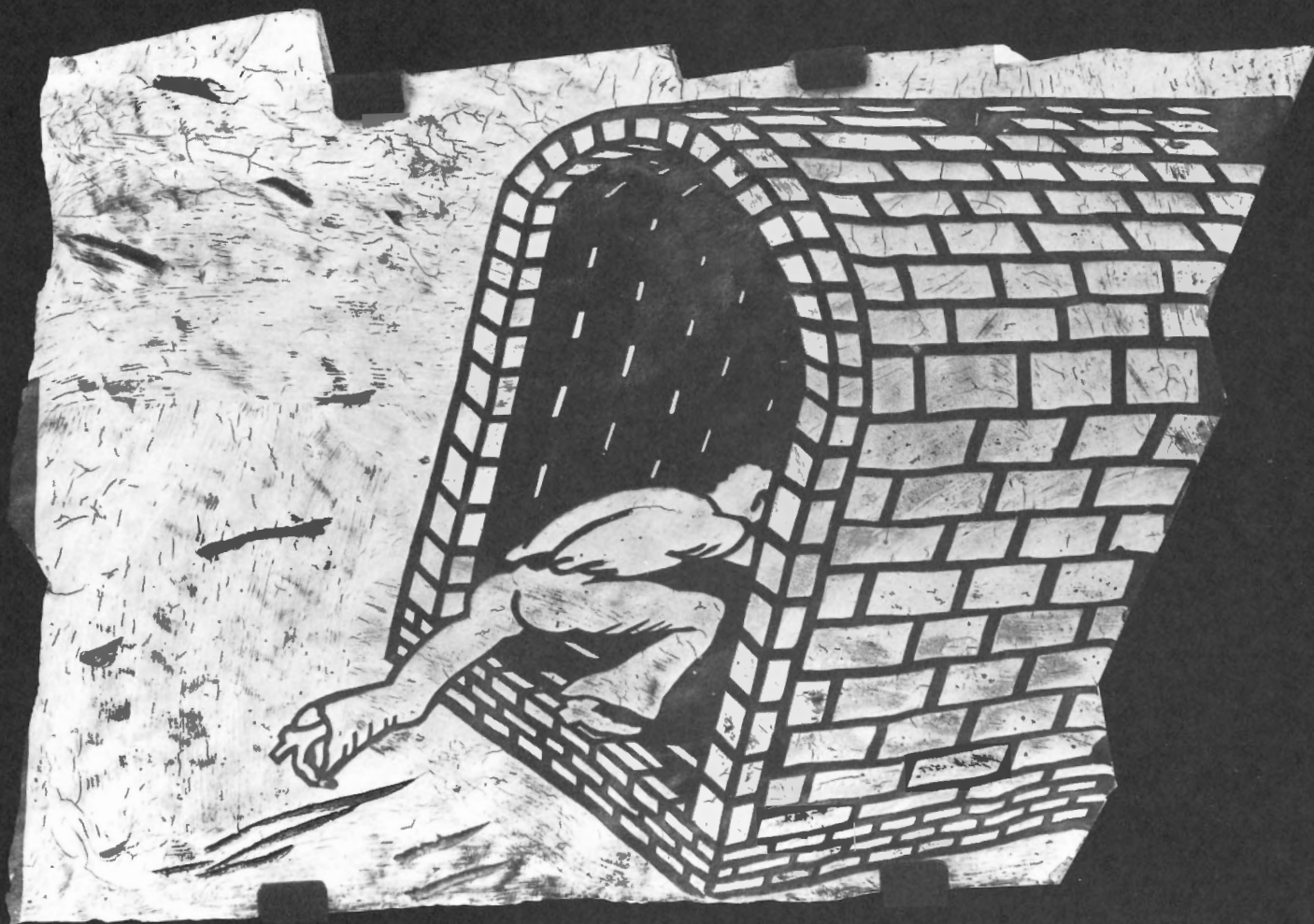
and the piece is later fired. The interaction between the evenly applied underslip and the rough-cut edges of the freely brushed overslip turns into an aggressive contrast between organic and hard-edged in the finished work.

Siler's approach to image-making reveals the distinction between the additive process of painting and sculpture and the immediate totality of a stenciled form. Conventional two-dimensional imagery is a combination of sequential and superimposed piecemeal activity: drawing, underpainting, *pentimenti*, and perhaps glazing. Modifications tend to happen at the lower or earlier stages of the process. With stencils, changes occur at the highest stratum of image-making: the finished picture. The cut stencils can be temporarily pinned to the ceramic body, adjusted, readjusted, maybe even eliminated. Then the slip is applied, and in one fell swoop the image is there. In painting, it's like being able to move an entire apple to another place on the canvas, rather than just altering a stroke in the highlight area. We're talking about a pot of chili, like the "hot red" that Siler concocts, as opposed to a multicourse dinner; concentrated, large gestures, rather than a series of smaller actions done in a specific order.

And speaking of chili, the art-life parallel emerges again in Siler's house. Originally a standard tract dwelling in a new subdivision, à la *Sunset* magazine, it has been transformed into a spacious studio lit by what was once a "cathedral ceiling" and is now a secularized functional vestige of the suburboid space-naming mania. "Rec room," "media room," "lanai"—these have all been reborn as utilitarian appendages of the main studio space. "Kitchen" and "bathroom" alone have retained their intended roles. What would have been a wall-to-wall shag rug is a continuous surface of pieced-together appliance box cardboard over industrial carpeting. Then there's the exterior: in aggressive violation of tract-house landscaping etiquette, Siler has cultivated a totally undisciplined, but very productive, garden; there is no lawn. Vigorous outcroppings of gangling, predatory sunflowers punctuate the burgeoning undergrowth of mixed blossoms and produce. Piles of pungent compost mingle with a bird feeder made from a stretcherless, half-backed chair supporting

a plinth topped by a seed platform ("... the chance meeting of an umbrella and a sewing machine on a dissection table ..."). No swingset, no hot tub, no Weber barbecue kettle on the deck; in fact, no deck. And in the double carport a 1955 Chevy pickup the color of a good charley horse the day after. Local legend has it that protective parents instruct their children to avoid Siler's house on their Halloween and Girl Scout cookie routes. The surrealistic overtones, the droll evisceration of the decorator's touch, the vandalized standards of suburban gardening—these have their counterparts in Siler's art. His pieces have a strong immediate impact; an impact from the collision and collusion of spirit and form reaching back to Far Eastern forebears and filtered through the expressionist trinity of Van Gogh, Rouault, and the Germans. But there are also comics and high school remembrances from the fifties: the "goofball," the "greaser," the "simp," and the "baddass" are all characters that populate Siler's ceramic surfaces. They can be humorous, but they are not caricatures. Though stylistically inspired by printed images like comics, Siler's figures are typically drawn from life. For these direct sketches his "studio" is often a counter seat in the downtown pancake house (where he takes daily coffee breaks), or behind the wheel of his parked car checking out the locals (which he did for hours during a recent trip to Los Angeles). He achieves the desired "rightness" of his people and their poses by making numerous minute adjustments in details, without losing the immediacy of the original sketch. With typical succinctness, Siler voices his concern that his pieces be "good." They must operate in the zone between caricature and document, between *Lampoon* and *Life*. To make it "good" is to combine graphic strength, narrative clarity, emotive allusion, and plastic presence.

The sequence of creative decisions and procedures is important to Siler. The stencils are the most time-consuming operation and are done first. Based originally on doodles and thumbnail sketches, the final stencils first mature as drawings, and then become cut-outs. Initially executed on paper, they are ultimately transferred to blotter paper. The leap from drawing to stencil is replete with mechanical concerns ("Will the image



hold together with all those holes?" and visual imperatives ("The stencil must maintain the character, spirit, and feeling of the drawing"). All cutting is done with a mat knife; Siler likes the heft and touch. The clay body is nothing exotic in composition: Lincoln fire clay, ball clay, sand, and grog. But, technical simplicity aside, mixing up a good batch of clay is, for Siler, a satisfying ceremonial activity that is basic in both senses—essential and fundamental. It's like making your own pie crust instead of buying a frozen shell. Assembly of the slabs and thrown components is important, structurally, but nonprecious in terms of finish. Siler wants his works to look like pieces of clay stuck together, with slip oozing out of the cracks, crosshatching and pinch marks evident, points of articulation obvious. When the final position of a stencil is determined, the paper is soaked in water, patted into place, and painted with overslip. The temptation to use low-fire glazes to achieve the images might appear natural; but Siler associates low-fire with "cute stuff" and he's not out to make glorified figurines or sleazy souvenirs that are difficult to distinguish from their parodies. Also, low-fire glazes come in tiny bottles, which would inhibit and restrict the visceral drawing and sweeping gestures he favors.

Patrick Siler is the Studs Terkel of the ceramic world. His work is no-nonsense, straightforward clay; yet it remains eloquent and curiously elegant. It is personal without being hermetic, elusive but not irritatingly enigmatic. Siler does not craft feckless echoes of Hamada or turn out dilute Hellenic amphora; he does not try to make clay look like leather or food, nor does he engage in precious celebrations of organic ceramic ritual ("earth, air, fire, water"; "mud into art"). In his work, there's an ingenuous, laconic way of telling a story that is also whimsical, gnomish, sometimes erotic, and usually immediate. If one gets the impression of rawness, of gritty presence, it emerges as a natural by-product, rather than as a labored attempt at primitive funkiness.

Siler's work has evolved from pottery surfaces to be drawn upon to ceramic vessels that embody stenciled imagery. He carefully considers the form-image relationship. For example, with the cylindrical shapes, the axis of the

freestanding clay form is usually askew to the axis of the image. The unsettled feeling is deliberate; "I put [the image] on the piece so it looks like it's in the piece." This attitude shares the curmudgeonly spirit and the desire of Frank Lloyd Wright, who insisted that his houses "be of the hill, not on it." Siler's clay statements have an aphoristic concision. They are visually arresting and communicate with a tantalizingly equivocal lucidity. Like his house, garden, and chili, Siler's works are personal and memorable.

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Opposite page: Throwing on the Electric Potter's Wheel (1982), 20" × 30" × 3" (50.8 × 76.2 × 7.6 cm). Photo: Arthur Okazaki.

Mr. Jiggy-Jaggy Pursued (1983), 32" (81.2 cm) high. Photo: Arthur Okazaki.





Born in 1950, Mark Burns grew up in a lower-middle-class bedroom community in Ohio in a house full of what Burns calls "Populist Objects"—such mass-produced dime-store objects as plastic flamingoes and palm tree lamps. These were neither precious nor art, but the decorations everyone could easily afford. This childhood environment of what some would call kitschy clutter seems to have instilled in Burns an affinity for busy surfaces of a somewhat industrial nature, like McCoy and late Roseville pottery.¹ Burns translates his nostalgia for formica and linoleum culture similarly to the way Kenny Sharf appropriates the technicolor imagery of Flintstones cartoons; both artists are able to incorporate their early experiences with mass culture into an aggressively personal statement. The Burns family also seems to have given him some degree of creative freedom at an early age; he fondly remembers being able to decorate and paint his bedroom himself. This innocuous fact in retrospect may be as important to Burns's career as the early use of kindergarten building blocks was to Frank Lloyd Wright's. Indeed, several times Burns has created entire thematic room environments—his *Hotel Lobby* of 1976 or *The Nursery* of 1982, for example. Curiously, the greatest influence on Burns has not been other ceramists, but illustrators. He himself was studying to be an illustrator at the Dayton Art Institute. This fact is not disguised, for Burns constantly combines his sculptures in a heavily compacted, information-rich manner that is more the provenance of the illustrator than the fine artist. Since the invention of Renaissance space, artists have usually positioned objects in real or illusionary fields. Even after Cubism, two-dimensional space was supposed to conform to concepts of the real world as transformed by non-Euclidean geometry. Illustrators, however, are not bound to

these conventions because they are more interested in conveying a story, a fable, a moral tale, or a commercial message. If a picture is worth a thousand words, then the multiple images of the illustrator compounded upon another in a single framework convey even more information. In a like manner, Burns's sculptures combine dense images, piled one on top of another, together with auxiliary information that contributes to the mood, if not the progress, of the narrative. Because sculpture deals with the figure extracted from the ground of painting, Burns cannot rely on collaged spaces or inserts of different time frameworks as a movie poster might,² but must pile image upon image in order to build an interconnecting structure. In some of Burns's works, the narrative is sketched out by juxtaposing images; in others, the scene depicted seems to be a pivotal point in the narrative, which tells all succinctly. Burns's sense of narrative was evident early in his career. When he began working in clay as an undergraduate at the Dayton Art Institute, Burns was already drawing on the surfaces of his vessels. Howard Kottler came through as a guest lecturer, spotted Burns's work, and told him to apply to graduate school at the University of Washington. Because he had only been involved in ceramics for a year and a half, Burns says he got into graduate school on the strength of his drawings rather than his clay work. At the University of Washington, Burns studied with Kottler and Patti Warashina. The sculptures he started constructing there share some of the attributes of both Kottler's and Warashina's works, but differ perceptibly also. Kottler's then unorthodox use of commercial molds and decals would have found sympathetic acceptance by Burns, who does not use commercial molds, but will use found objects, decals, or any other material that

suits his purpose. Approximately one-fourth of his recent works are constituted not of clay, but found wood, plastic, even arrows from a sporting goods store in one case. For the assemblages to function well, the found sections must be integrated into the work so that the "ceramic material and the found objects are comfortable" together. Most times this is accomplished through the use of paint—as Burns says, "paint is immediate, glazes not." There are no strict, fast rules here: Burns does not paint surfaces in order to fool the eye into believing it is seeing another material—as Kottler does—but rather to modify and unify his constructions; at other times, he will leave real tree branches or toy plastic letters exposed without camouflage. However, there are more differences between Kottler and Burns than these. Burns is primarily interested in mood and narrative; he will think of ideas that he wishes to convey, many times in a series of allied themes, and then find suitable imagery to convey them. Whereas many assemblagists join their imagery with mindless abandon, hoping that a stream of consciousness reading will produce some meaning, Burns actively arranges his images to produce specific readings. Kottler, on the other hand, shows little concern for the meanings of images:

Most of my work in ceramic sculpture involves the use of camouflage coupled with the relationship between nonrelated images. . . . I use images already available—casting is simpler and faster than modeling. I purchase molded pieces already cast, use prepared glazes and junked ceramic objects; in fact, I seldom touch clay. I use other people's molds, other people's ideas and other people make my ceramic decals. I just assemble the parts.³

The relationship of Burns's oeuvre to Warashina's is perhaps more problematic.

Mark Burns: Saints and Sinners ***Confessions of a Child of the Fifties***

Sid Sachs

Like Burns, Warashina constructs meaningful tableaux. She also thinks of clay as a liberating material, free from the sacred aura of the High Art mediums of painting and sculpture:

In painting and sculpture you always think "You've got to make art, capital A." Ceramics is a unique field because you don't have to; you can make anything you want and call it whatever you want. You can paint it, it's expedient, and it's a relatively cheap material to expedite your ideas.⁴

Both artists work with humor; Warashina in a more surrealist mood, Burns in a much blacker vein. Both paint and glaze their works; here Burns may even have affected a change in the older Warashina's later matte surfaces. Warashina will often play off two- and three-dimensional space in the same work, making a paradoxical, Magritte-like illusion. "I like Arshile Gorky, and I also liked a lot of Surrealists," says Warashina, "but I was more interested in that spatial quality, the floating imagery of their compositions."⁵ Warashina seems to strive for that floating quality in much of her works. The Surrealist influence in Burns's work is akin to early Miró and Dalí assemblages, built piecemeal from objects. His sculptures are volumetric, solid, monolithic, and direct.

After receiving his MFA from the University of Washington in 1974, Burns taught at a number of schools, probably the most important of which for his career was the Philadelphia College of Art. Although he has since left that school (and spent 1982 through 1983 as a Visiting Artist at the University of Arizona in Tucson), he has returned to Philadelphia. In 1983, he was one of the artists selected for the exhibition, "Affects/Effects," a compendium of influential instructors at PCA during its first century of existence.

What are some of the characteristics of Burns's mature works? They are assemblages of disparate images that tell a simple narrative or revolve around a *mise-en-scène*. Often the individual objects are part of a series, exhibited together to form an environment. An early, well-known example is *Rattlesnake Teapot*, misdated 1967 in Clark and Hugto's *A Century of American Ceramics* (when Burns was still in high school); it is actually from 1973. Functional though eccentric, it spouts tea from the snake's mouth and has a handle comprised of a loop of the snake. Perhaps more uncomfortable to use than a George Ohr puzzle mug, the *Rattlesnake Teapot* shows Burns's black humor and the element of danger or anxiety that pervades most of his work. Would one not drink venom from such a pot, rather than tea, and would one be as cavalier in handling a snake as the disembodied hand implies? Burns's art was mislabeled Punk for awhile, due to their coincident occurrence, a shared iconography of 1950s imagery, and the ever-present threat of danger. Both Punk and Burns criticize Atomic Age culture, but from very different viewpoints: Burns is actually fond of the populist, nonelitist character of his childhood, while the Punks hate theirs with a nihilistic vengeance. As one English Punk put it:

All punks are working-class and proud of it, except we're not working any more seeing as how there's no jobs and the one's we're offered are a load of shit, monotonous, garbage jobs. . . . Might just as well sit there reading the graffiti as learning about Henry the Eighth and the other rich bastards. . . . Who wants to spend the best years working at some wet job saving up for a semi and watching trash telly all evening? . . . Anyhow, what's the point of saving up, planning for the future, when we might all be blown up by the fucking H-bomb tomorrow.⁶

The Punks seem to be saying, "This is all you deserve, it is trash; you don't really care about the world or its inhabitants (me), so I will make you as sick as you make me." Burns obviously uses the same sources, but his critique is benign, not abrasive, more about art and less about political issues. He challenges the ceramic hierarchy, which puts the vessel on a pedestal, by showing vessels filled or used (even an umbrella rack on one work). Homosexuality is portrayed; in one work, a salt pillar at Sodom and Gomorrah is portrayed as a pair of white jockey shorts. In *Pinnocchio* (1982), children's building blocks coyly spell out "EXS (sic) LIVE HUMAN BOY." The world to Burns is just what it is; it is not necessarily good or bad. Rules may be broken, if one accepts the responsibility, and to live beyond the law you must be honest. Yes, you may play with fire, but you will get burned (*Little Hot Heads*). Yes, you can be greedy, but at a price (the Midas legend in *The Golden Touch*). *Trick or Treat Bag* contains a razor imbedded in an apple and a small skull with a crown of thorns, more reminiscent of Golgotha than Halloween; memento mori and yearly newspaper warnings merged. There is content with impact; half for its shock value, half for personal reasons.

Burns's 1976 exhibition at Helen Drutt Gallery in Philadelphia became a popular success story. His first mixed-media environment, entitled the *Hotel Lobby*, it included real objects that related to that theme, such as an eight-foot section of wall furniture, along with his sculptures. Innocently, and coincidentally, *Today* magazine, a Sunday supplement to *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, did a spread on Burns's home and its collections the Sunday prior to the opening. This piqued enough interest for the NBC affiliate news team to visit the gallery early on the evening of the opening. Burns, on live

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Chang and Eng (Siamese Saints) (1983), 60" (150 cm) high, stoneware, straw, wicker, wood, and bone. Courtesy Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia. Photo: Guy Mancuso.

St. Vitus (1983), 48" (120 cm) high, stoneware, earthenware, plastic, and glass. Courtesy Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia. Photo: Guy Mancuso.



Little Hot Heads (1982), 18" (45 cm) high, earthenware and wood. Courtesy Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia. Photo: Will Brown.

St. Nick (1983), 42" (105 cm) high, stoneware, earthenware, wood, and metal. Courtesy Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia. Photo: Guy Mancuso.

Pinnochio (1982), 36" x 52" x 14" (90 x 130 x 35 cm), earthenware. Courtesy Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia. Photo: Will Brown.



camera, invited everyone to come to his opening—which they did. Throngs of people were still waiting down the block to see Burns's works when the gallery finally closed at eleven o'clock that evening.

Burns's 1982 show at Drutt Gallery was another environment, *The Nursery*, comprising nine sculptures in a gallery painted pink, complete with linoleum flooring and faux building blocks that spelled out "Burns" over the mantel.

Although fairy tales and horror movies might seem more fitting to the domain of childhood and adolescence than the realm of fine art, one need only remember Calder's drawings for *Aesop's Fables* or the illustrations of Matisse and Balthus to correct such a misconception.

Furthermore, as Bruno Bettelheim demonstrates in *The Uses of Enchantment*, fairy tales function on a deeper level as morality tales, which teach children the workings of society in allegorical terms. Burns's works are morality plays masquerading as kitsch.

In Arizona, Burns completed six sculptures of saints; they are of his own making in mythological terms and not true to Catholic lore. The sculptures are: *St. Joan*, *St. Francis*, *St. Nick*, *St. Vitus*, *St. Valentine*, and *Chang and Eng*, the infamous nineteenth-century Siamese twins, to whom Burns has granted sainthood. The scale of these new works, which range from three to five feet tall, has increased in magnitude. Burns also visited nearby Mexico while in Tucson, and its religious images had a great influence on these sculptures. Instead of the smooth whiteware clay bodies he has used for years, Burns turned to the indigenous, sandy clays of the area, which obviously changes the surface qualities of the sculptures. There is much carving, incising, and gilding to be seen as well. Yet the West has not tamed Burns's wildness; *St. Vitus*, a combination of Adam

Ant and Frankenstein in leather jacket, is perched on top of a 1950s radio, wearing a fluorescent tube for a halo.

In summary, Mark Burns's attitude to Mass Culture is expansive. Like Modernism itself, he dangerously expands upon the resources of our culture to include populist imagery of all kinds: naïf monuments and gardens, Schwitters's Merzbau, movie posters, commercial illustration, religious shrines and grottoes, Surrealist assemblage. Each sculpture quotes from itself and from its sources, though it doesn't mix metaphor, as in Punk and Post-Modern inventions. They are traditional additive sculptures, almost Victorian in their mélange of matter and nostalgia, with more story telling capacity than most abstract works in the Modernist period.

1. Not only was Ohio important in the origins of the American Art Pottery movement, but it is significant that by the 1950s, the period of Burns's childhood, Ohio was still producing huge quantities of more standard fare whose surface qualities are not dissimilar to some of the artist's.

2. Burns has a huge collection of movie posters, especially of the monster and horror genre, and movie books. In talking to him, I found we both shared a fondness for the movie, *Bladerunner*, a film universally panned by the critics, but which is visually stunning, filled with a Rococo amount of visual information that the mind is barely able to take in. Burns also expressed admiration for the illustrators of a more demonic character, such as John Tenniel and Maurice Sendak, whose works have a direct bearing on Burns's sensibilities.

3. As found in Garth Clark and Margie Hughto, *A Century of Ceramics in the United States* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979), p. 301.

4. As found in Susan Wechsler, *Low-Fire*

Ceramics (New York: Watson-Guitt Publications, 1981), p. 125.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

6. As found in Bevis Hillier, *The Style of the Century, 1900-1980* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1983), p. 224.

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Trick or Treat (1982), 29" (72.5 cm) high, earthenware, wood, and metal. Courtesy Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia. Photo: Will Brown.

The Midas Touch (1982), 24" (60 cm) high, earthenware. Courtesy Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia. Photo: Will Brown.

Exhibitions

*Building Facade (1983), 15" (38 cm) high.
Courtesy Maria Friedrich, Cambridge,
Massachusetts. Photo: Susie Cushner.*

*Trees Water Buildings (1983), 26" (66 cm)
diameter. Collection of Daniel Jacobs, New
York. Photo: Michael McTwigan.*



Jod Lourie

Charles Giuliano

Clay was anathema to young sculptors during the late fifties, and so it was to Jod Lourie, then a student at the Boston Museum School. But this attitude changed when she and her husband Richard moved to California. There she began working with Peter Voulkos—a powerful presence who pushed her limits on an artistic level—and she soon realized that clay was a viable material with its own noble traits.

After a two-year hiatus, she returned to clay when she met and studied with Al Jonsen in Santa Cruz. It was here that she first worked with porcelain; submitting to the discipline of throwing the same forms repeatedly on the wheel, she slowly learned to refine and perfect simple, functional pieces. In an entire year, Jonsen let her fire only once. Eventually, she produced a line of serene functional pottery, almost Oriental in feeling, which she marketed through an agent.

The ease of California life evaporated quickly, however, when the Lourie family relocated to Boston in 1975. Here she found no facilities, and not much of a clay community, to compare to the West Coast. She continued working in clay, temporarily, at the Radcliffe Institute, until a classified ad in the newspapers pointed to a new direction. Lourie was one of seven potters who put up two thousand dollars each to form the Clay Dragon cooperative studio in 1976. For the next year and a half, they devoted their full energies to renovating the large loft and equipping it with three oil-burning kilns.

Ironically, once the Clay Dragon facility was fully functioning, Lourie had lost interest in making utilitarian objects. Her teapots evolved into sculptures, which resulted in an invitation to join Naga Gallery. Her first show there, in 1979, comprised ceramic towels suspended from cables painted to look like rope, as well as fragments of anatomy strategically draped. This *Clothesline Series* earned her the criticism of traditional potters, though not the confraternity of fine artists.

Not lacking determination, Lourie began working six and seven days a week to clarify her artistic aims. As part of her workaholic routine, she exercised at a health club every morning on her way to the studio. Here she found the companionship and support of other women; eventually, the camaraderie and environment of the locker room began to appear in her art. Lourie became intrigued with the feeling of vulnerability the women experienced when showering and changing clothes.

The shift toward figurative imagery presented problems, however. Her porcelain clay body lacked the plasticity and strength to model these figures, and her attempts to fire the body casts in the Clay Dragon's oil-burning kilns met with failure. At the time she was struggling with these problems, Marilyn Levine was lecturing and leading workshops at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art, in conjunction with an exhibition there. It was during one of these sessions that Lourie discussed her work with Levine, who readily understood Lourie's dilemma and was able to suggest modifications to the porcelain clay body (Levine had been a chemist before becoming a sculptor) and techniques for successful firing in an electric kiln. This advice was a breakthrough for Lourie, who has since further refined her working methods. Lourie rolls out thin sheets of porcelain, presses them onto the model, and then dries them with a hair dryer. These are removed when still malleable and, after firing, are joined with epoxy putty. Lourie also incorporates actual objects into her work—such as jewelry or furniture—which she paints white to match the

porcelain. Although the artist is not interested in verisimilitude, the juxtaposition of modeled, realistic figures and found objects forces the viewer to unravel for himself what is real and what is clay.

The resulting *Locker Room Series* (1981) not only dealt with the issues of privacy, exposure, and vulnerability, but represented a turning point in Lourie's life as both an artist and a woman. As she was growing stronger and as her work became more resolved, the lives of many of her friends were in crisis: relationships were foundering, marriages were ending in divorce. These were the immediate catalyst for her *Bedscape Series* (1983), initially comprising anguished and estranged women in bed. Male partners eventually joined these women in the *Bedscares*; we see them reading, arguing, or at play. The introduction of male figures led to further studies of men and women together, now in gyms. Lourie also returned to the theme of vulnerability with a series of *Vanitas*, linking women with such socially prescribed symbols as mirrors, jewelry, and cosmetics.

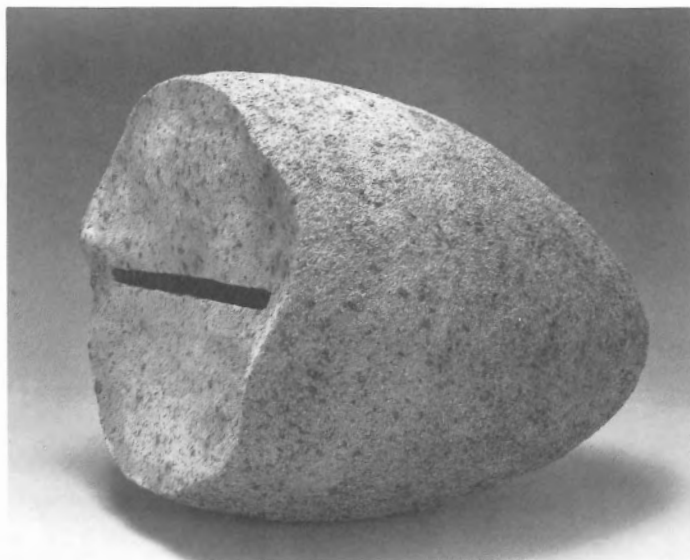
With enormous energy, dedication, and technical ingenuity, Jod Lourie has struggled for a decade to transform her material from its traditional use in functional pottery to the needs of contemporary sculpture. The years of struggle behind her, Lourie is happily enjoying her current success and critical encouragement, as she works toward the future with enthusiasm and inventiveness.

Since her show last November at Stux Gallery, Boston, Jod Lourie has been working on a series of Human Altars that will be shown this April at Stux.

Charles Giuliano is an art historian, teacher, and art critic who writes regularly for the Boston Patriot Ledger and Art New England.

Graham Marks

Robert C. Morgan



Untitled (1983), 34" (86.4 cm) long. Courtesy
Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia. Photo:
Jamey Stillings.

The earthenware sculpture of Graham Marks has become increasingly sophisticated over the past three years. The changes are subtle. The task has been one of refinement and meaning—or, perhaps, refinement toward meaning. Morphologically, there are three parts to each of his pieces: the outer surface, the inner volume, and the contoured lip or face that separates the other two. In order for a Marks sculpture to function in visual terms, these three elements need cohesiveness and balance.

Then there is the question of where the forms come from. That is, what is the meaning of their source and their direction? They maintain a vestige of containment; their roots in the vessel shape are evident. Yet they are gigantic forms. This is where materiality comes into play. One is aware that Marks is coiling thick snakes of earthenware clay—not bronze or wood or marble—but clay. Real matter, corresponding to the earth, the source of inspiration, the ovum: signifying what strange or banal presence?

The strongest work is unglazed, partially glazed, and sandblasted. I will cite two forms in particular, both untitled from 1983. The outer surface of the first is covered entirely by evenly spaced nodules. Such a remarkable epidermis could have evolved either from land or from water; it appears tough and impregnable. The inner volume, if there is one, is invisible. Invisible because the contoured lip has become a full face, another stony surface bearing the cracks of firing. The cracks breathe life into this sealed vessel. The absence of interiority intensifies its mystery. But what is the mystery in an earthenware form by Graham Marks? Not mystification; not pretension. The emphasis is on the presence, the physicality, of the form itself. Nothing is hidden. No meaning is obscured. It is all here. The monument or marker stands by itself, or it stands for nothing.

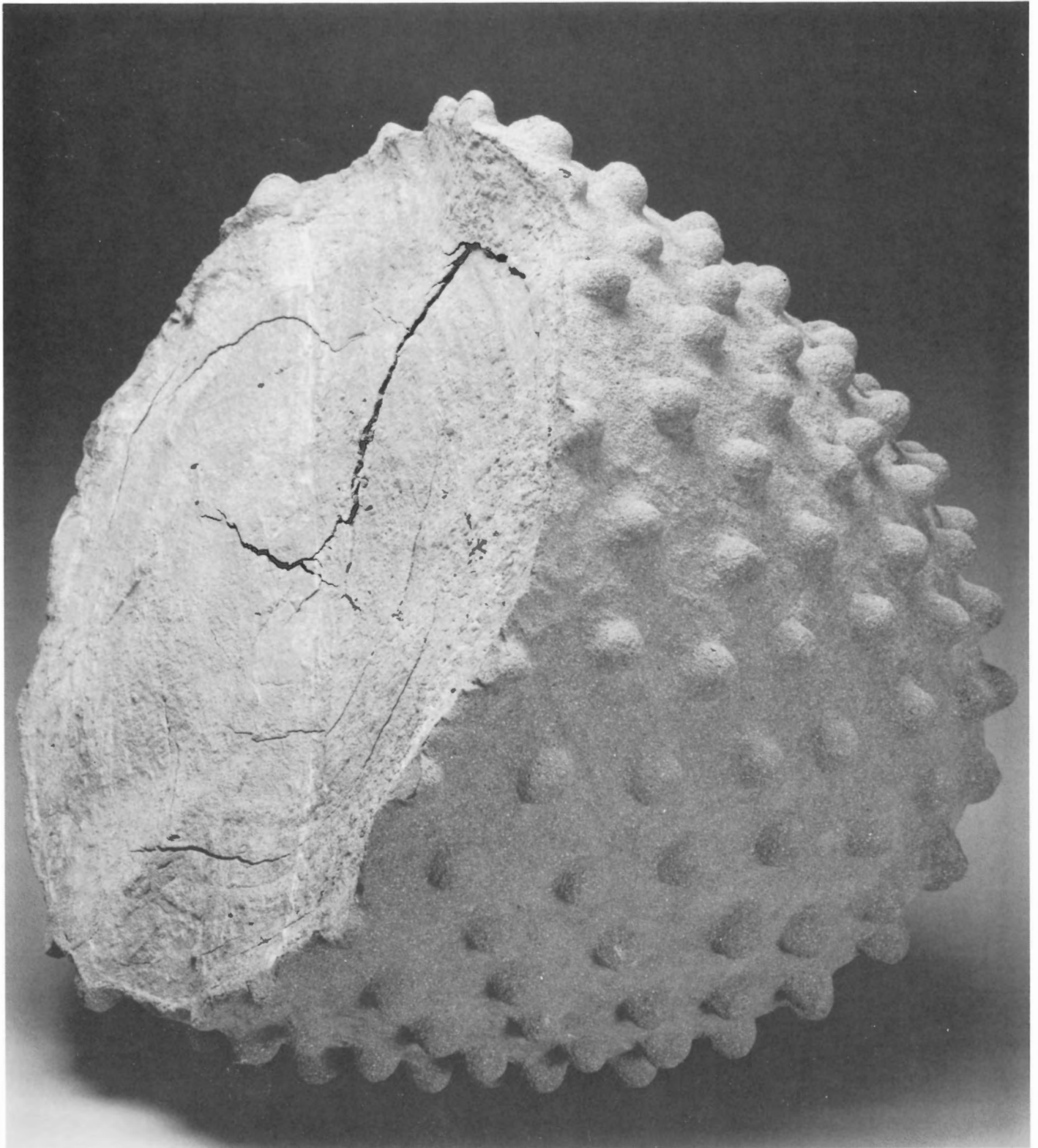
A second piece by Marks is distinguished by a long, thin slit across its face, just high enough to accommodate the curious, searching fingers of the viewer. The orb itself is flatter, longer, than his other forms. By not tilting its face upward to meet our gaze, this piece remains at rest, quietly self-contained. Its surface, too, is unassuming, granitelike.

The horizontal slit functions in two ways: as a mark upon a solid; as an invitation to another space. As mark or incision, the horizontal slit operates like a sign, calling our attention to the force of gravity. Parallel to the ground plane, the slit is the orb's built-in horizon. Figure and ground fuse, yet there is no lack of depth. The mark recedes and we must follow. As invitation to another world, its secret becomes our quest. Just as we peer in, it stares out. Yet eyes do not look this way. Its monocular gaze gives no information; the more we stare back, the less it tells us. The power of the sign is an incision into darkness, a beckoning mystery on the face of light.

Graham Marks's recent sculpture was shown at Bevier Gallery, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York (October 23–November 6, 1983) and at Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia (November 12–December 10, 1983).

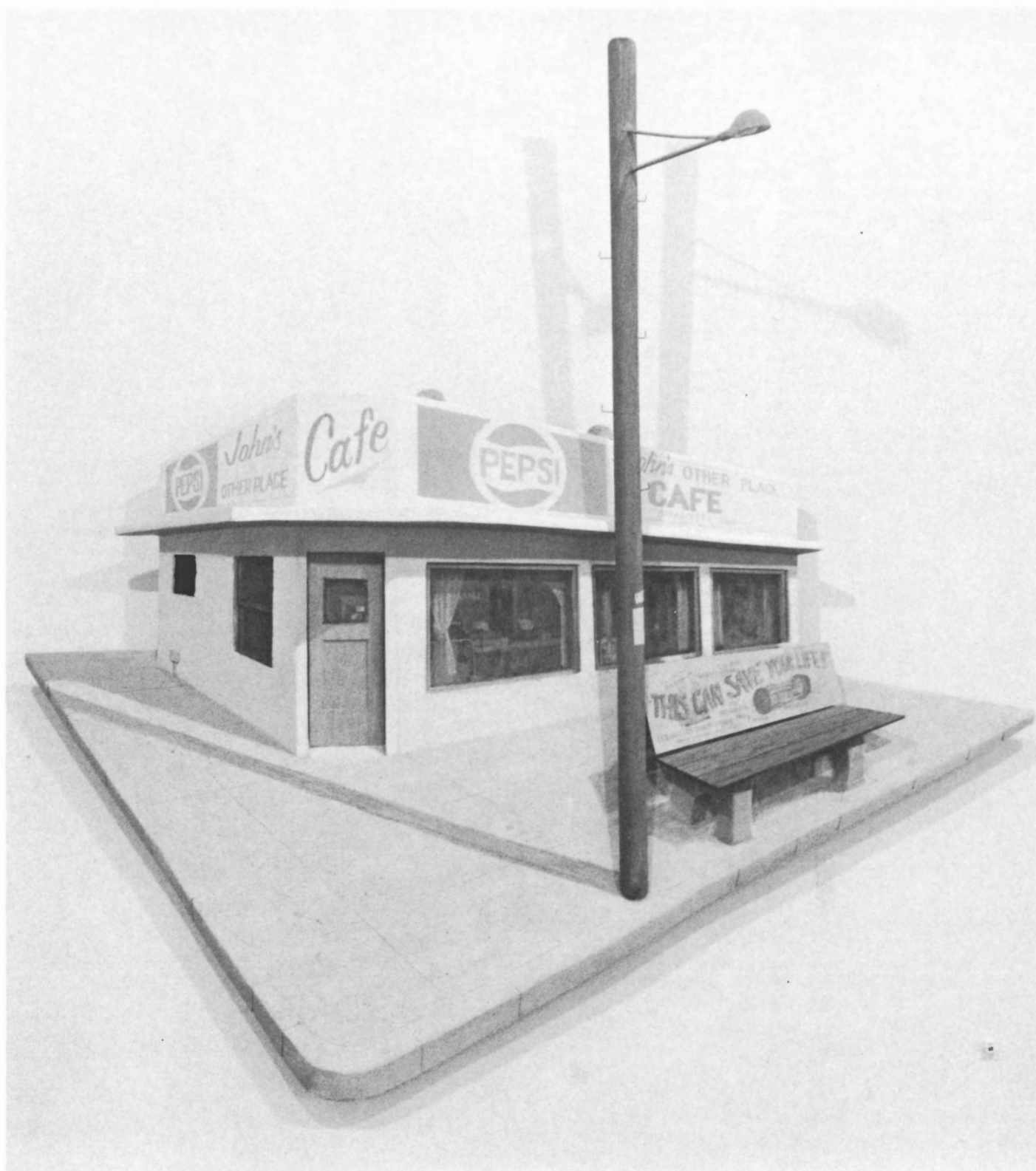
Robert C. Morgan is a painter, intermedia artist, and assistant professor of art history at the Rochester Institute of Technology.

Untitled (1983), 31" (78.7 cm) long. Courtesy
Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia. Photo:
Jamey Stillings.



John's Other Place (1983), 35" × 34" × 9"
(89 × 85 × 23 cm).

North Philly (1983), 35" × 46" × 1³/₄"
(89 × 115 × 4.5 cm).



Mel Rubin

Chris Westphal

Mel Rubin's recent bas-relief sculptures of urban buildings run the risk of being judged clichés on the themes of loneliness and desolation. One can almost recall the scenes in the film, *The Last Picture Show*, from which these ten vignettes might be culled: we're on the outskirts of town, where the mood is angry and raw, where papers and dust blow in the streets. Among the subjects for study: a Foster's Freeze, a boarded-up brick apartment building, an old garage with faded signs on its cinderblock walls, a whitewashed stucco cafe, called "John's Other Place." But there is strident, often dark humor here. Rubin's abandoned city is still inhabited by the shadows of its former denizens. A jolly Santa Claus waves a Coca-Cola at us from a billboard on the wall of an abandoned tenement. Another wall of the same piece shows the tracings of old staircases; nearby, the weathered remains of a demolished building reveal what is left of an interior wall, flat and exposed to the elements. This, perhaps more than any other piece, conveys the sense of something missing, something tragically lost. Innocence, perhaps.

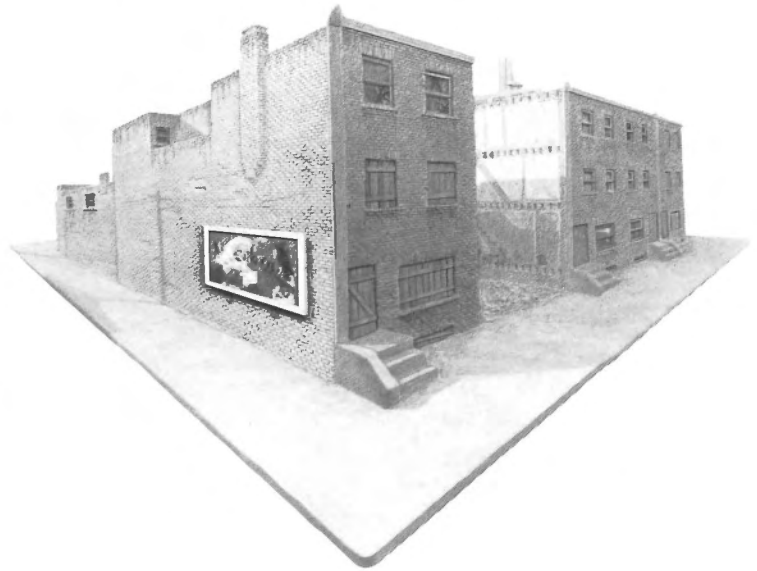
When people appear—which they do in three of the pieces—they are boxy and obvious; their shadows and the things they've left behind carry their depth better than they do themselves. Yet the work shows great vitality and depth. Rubin's grasp of perspective—his ability to make a flat surface reach out to the viewer—is integral to the work. By depicting each from a corner perspective, we are compelled to pursue this faded world to its vanishing point.

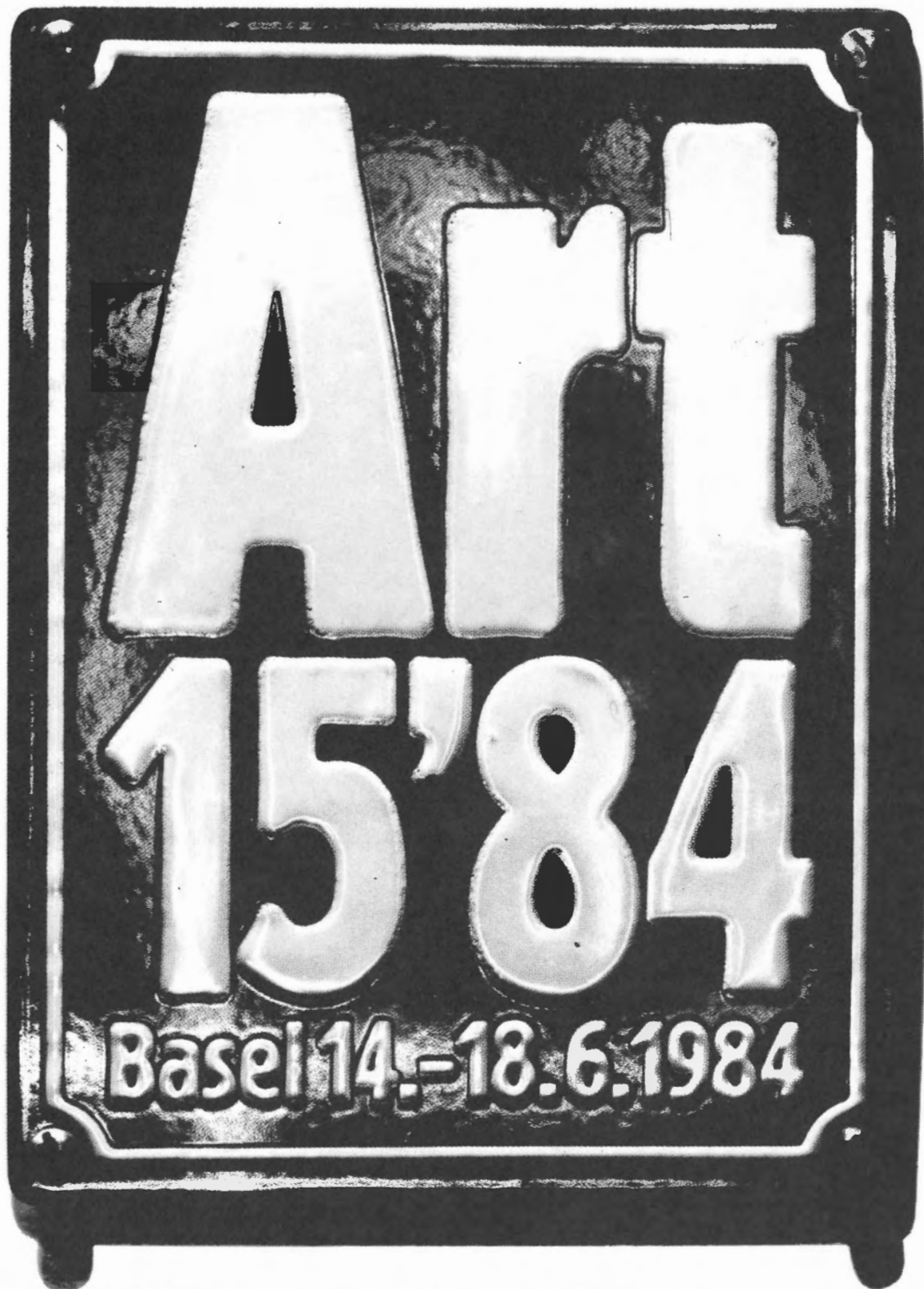
In a way, looking at them is like playing around with a wide-angle lens for the first time: seen in a different way, the ordinary becomes extraordinary. Common details—a sign on a bus bench reading, "This Vial Can Save Your Life"; or on a boarded-up garage, "If you like our service, tell others. If not, call BA7-0272,"—take on an almost desperate urgency. But being the messages of an Advertising Age, there is something evanescent about them. Something that realizes we are only passing by and might not really pay attention. A sign in the window of Foster's Freeze advises customers, "Next Window, Please," while inside, through the clouded glass, we see the washed-out milkshake machine, the cup dispensers, and counters—the details we are really intended to see.

The feeling is one of peering through glass—at something forbidden, perhaps, or something long forgotten. It's as though we can see the richness here that is ignored by the people on the other side of the camera, who see only from a distance, and scan it quickly. The details are faded, like the signs, as though time has weathered everything, leaving only the highlights. We must work back from these clues: to imagine who these people are, where they might have gone. To imagine exactly what life was like here. Rubin's eye for filtered detail and perspective, and his ability to capture these in painted ceramic, make the work compelling and sad somehow, like looking around endless corners for something . . . something missing. We squint to see through that clouded glass, beyond the shadows.

Mel Rubin's recent sculpture was exhibited at John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco (June 15–July 16, 1983).

Chris Westphal is a journalist and freelance writer in Los Angeles.





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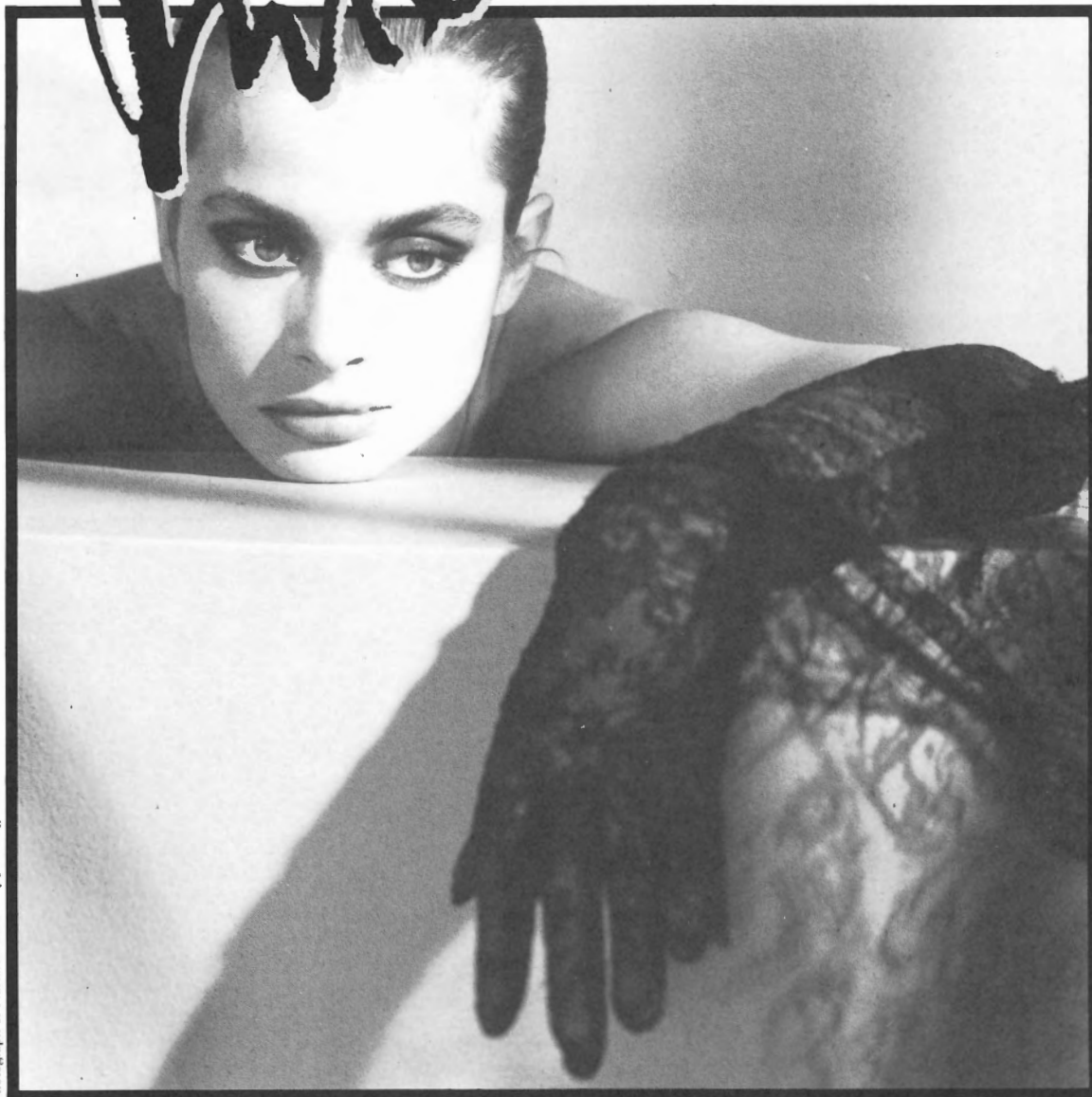
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Photograph of Nastassia Kinski by Jean Pagliuso

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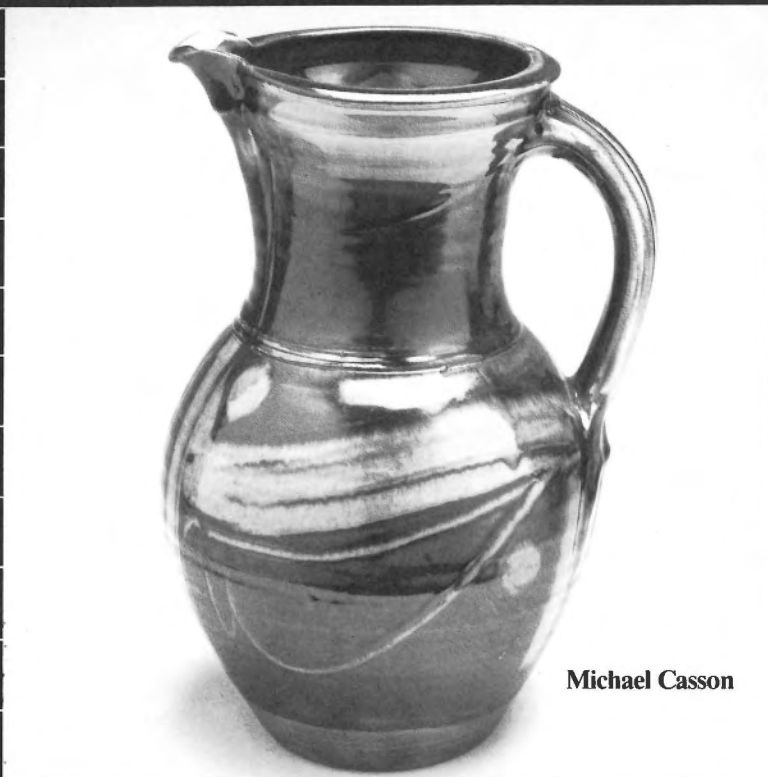
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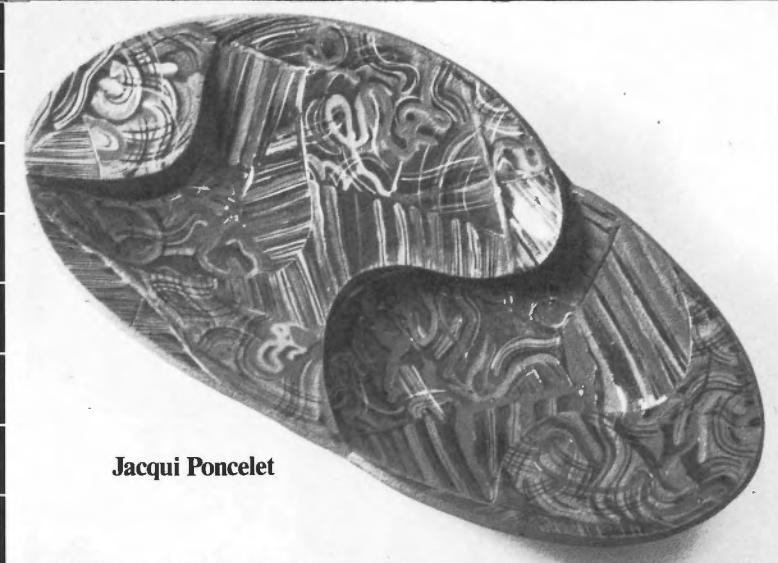
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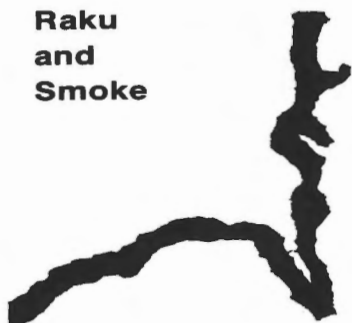
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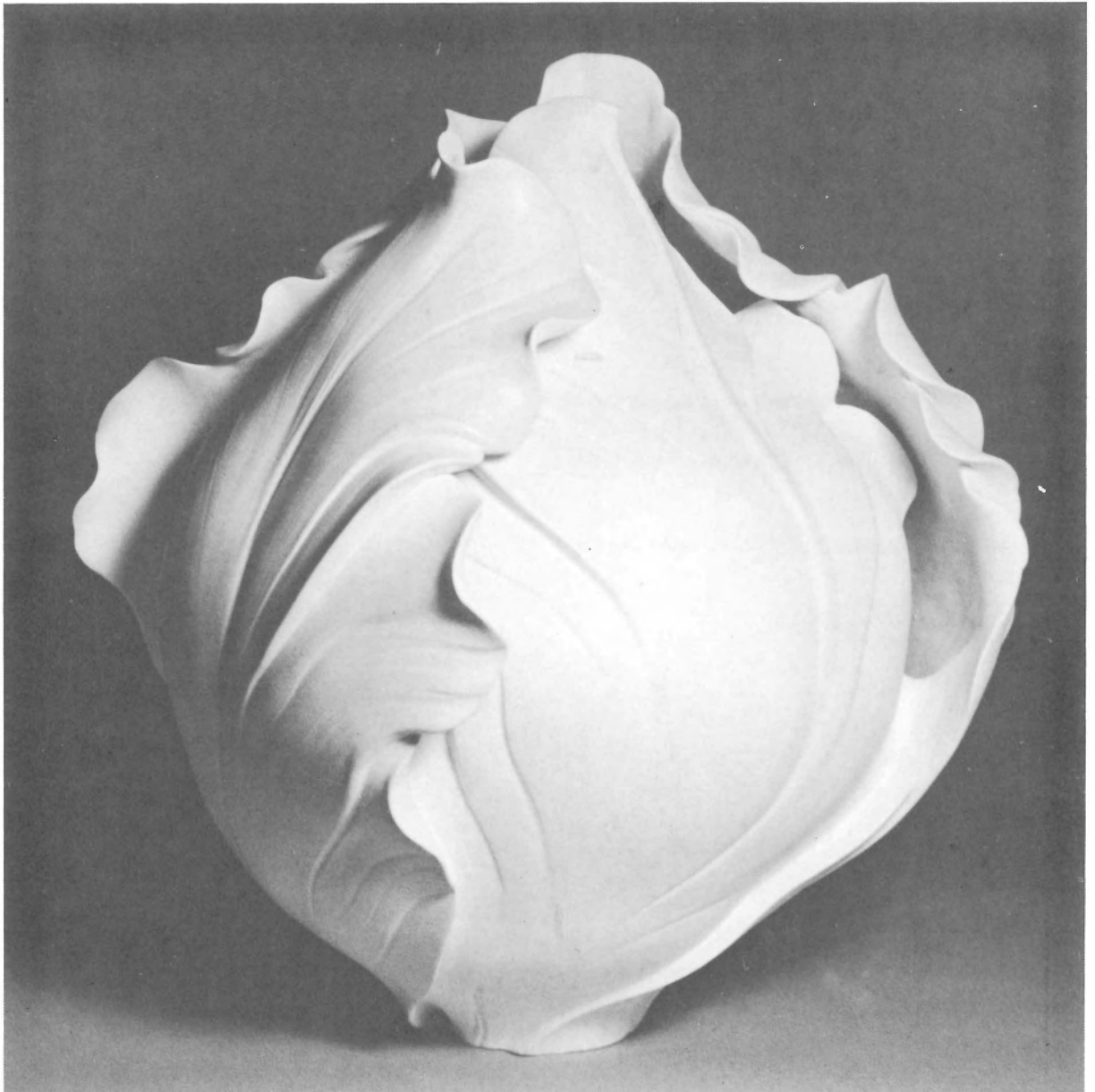
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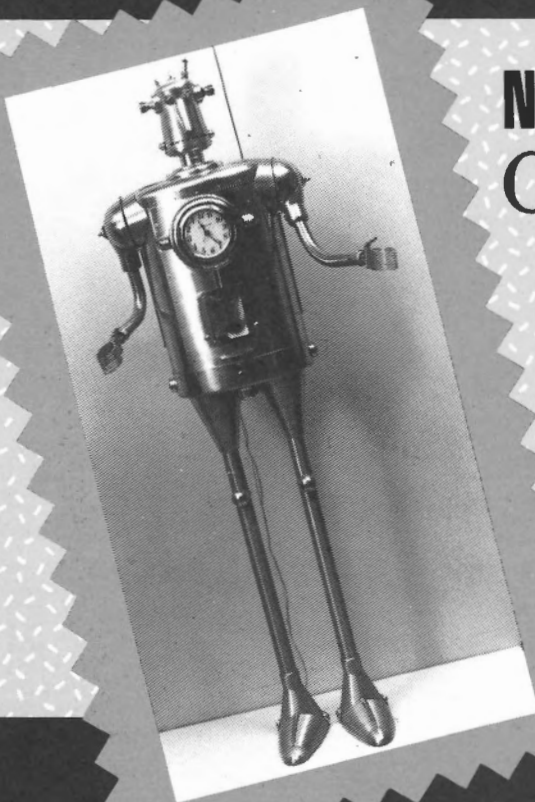
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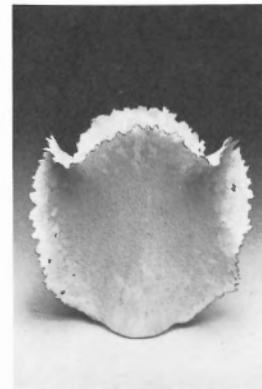
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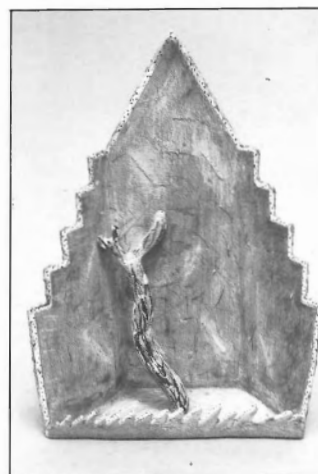
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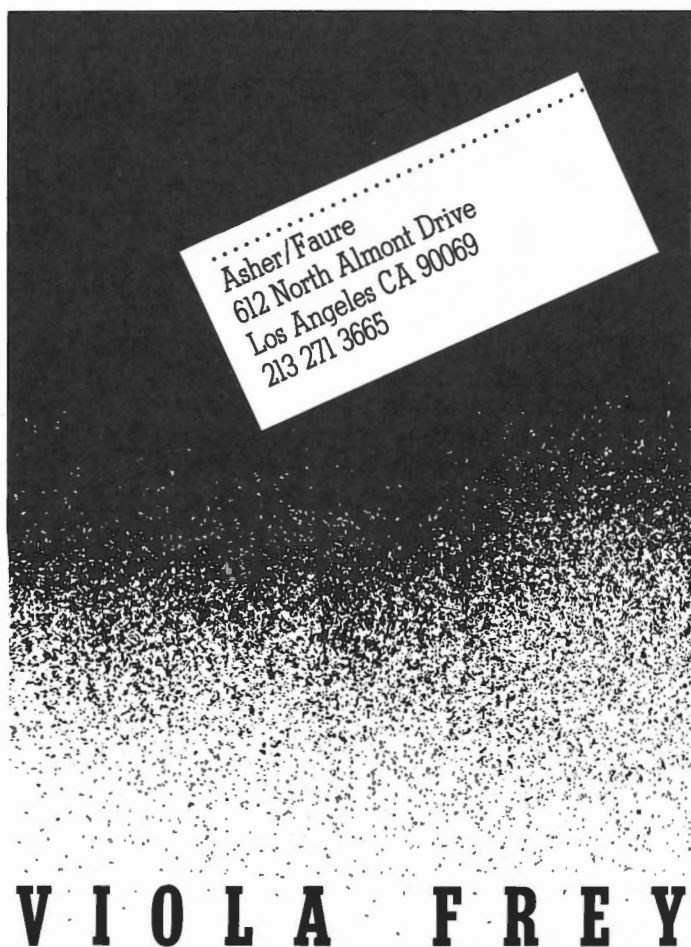
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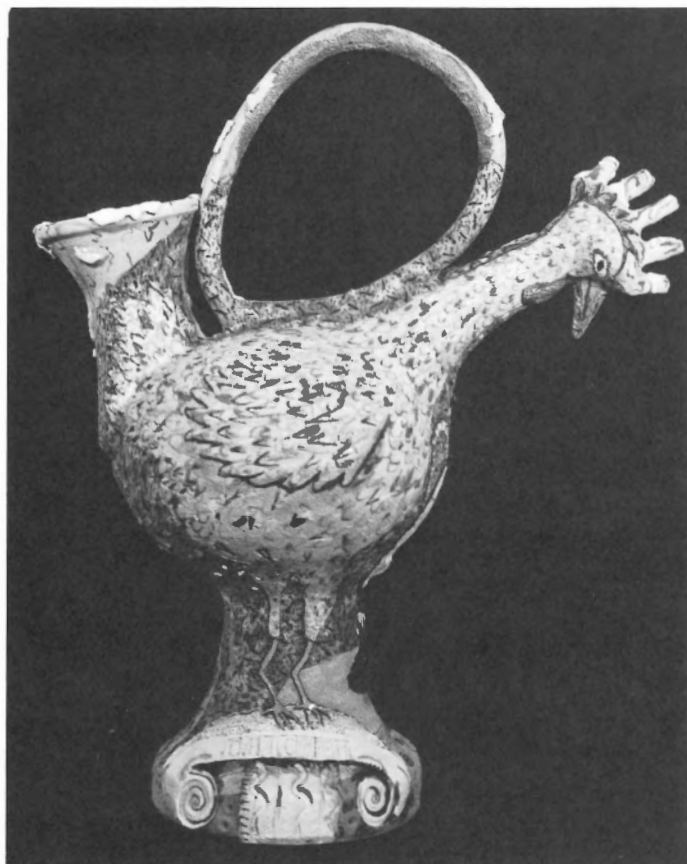
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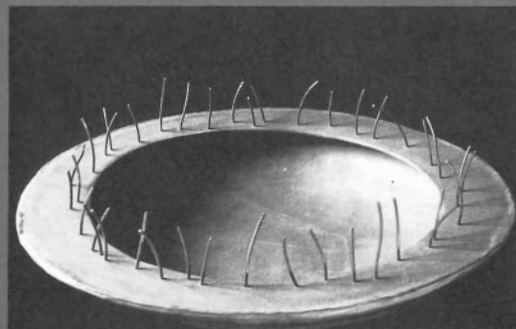


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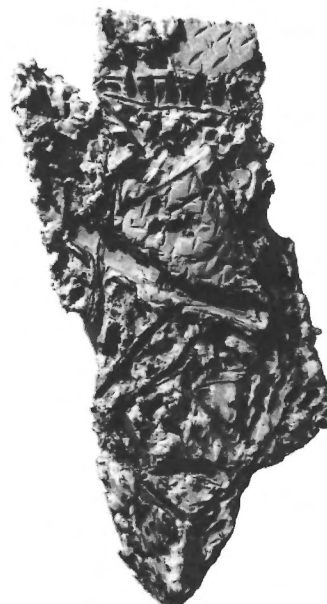
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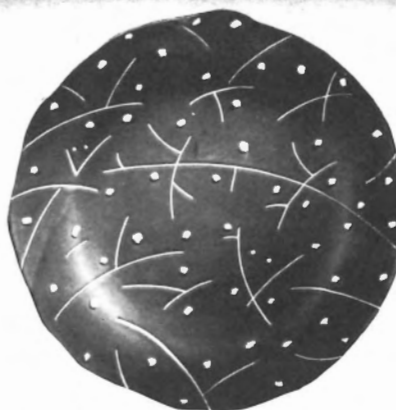
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A mixed media installation

VISITING LECTURERS:

April 8
Garth Clark
May 15
Michael McTwigan

For more information contact:
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MODERNISM & CERAMICS TODAY

◆
a lecture by
Michael McTwigan
Editor, American Ceramics Magazine

May 15 at 7:30pm

◆
Auditorium
School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Columbus Drive at Jackson Blvd.

◆
For further information, write or call:
Lill Street Gallery, 1021 Lill St.
Chicago, IL 60614 (312) 248 4414

◆
Sponsored by the Lill Street Gallery

Alfred University Summer School in Ceramic Art

June 24-August 2, 1984

Instructors:
Wayne Higby
Kirk Mangus
Mary Law

Visiting Artists:
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Bruce Cockrane

Catalog upon request:
Dean Lewis Butler
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Alfred University
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Summer workshops in Japan: July 25-August 29, 1984
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NCECA Regional Student Juried Exhibition

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Boston University Program in Artisanry
Massachusetts College of Art
Rhode Island College
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The School of the Museum of Fine Arts
Southeastern Massachusetts University
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Thompson Gallery
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364 Brookline Avenue
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Lopoukhine Gallery
10 Newbury Street
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March 28 to April 21, 1984
Opening: March 31, 2-5:30pm

*Ceramics and mixed media by the faculty
of Boston University Program in Artisanry,
Massachusetts College of Art and the School
of the Museum of Fine Arts*

Michael Barsanti

Gladys Bel

Mark Cooper

David Davidson

Chris Gustin

Rick Hirsch

Janna Longacre

Ben Ryterband

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BOSTON MUSEUM SCHOOL GALLERY

April 5-15, 1984

● **Location**

School of the Museum
of Fine Arts
230 The Fenway
Boston, MA 02115
(617) 267-9300

● **Hours**

Monday-Friday 9 a.m.-9 p.m.
Saturday 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
Sunday 1 p.m.-6 p.m.

● **Reception**

Tuesday, April 10, 3-6:30 p.m.

The School is a department of the Museum of Fine Arts.
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May 1-31, 1984
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2400 Third Avenue South
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Meet the artist on Thursday, May 10, 5–8 p.m.

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Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville

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Robert Brady/Sandy Simon
Richard Bresnahan
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Ruth Duckworth
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Rob Forbes
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Jane Gustin
Chuck Hindes
Randy Johnston
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Kirk Mangus
John Mason
Robert McGowen
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Dennis R. Mitchell
Mineo Mizuno
Jeff Oestreich
Don Pilcher
Thomas Potter
Ken Price
Don Reitz
Harvey Sadow
Katsuyuki Sakazume
Norm Schulman
David Shaner
Pat Siler
Paul Soldner
Robert Sperry
Toshiko Takaezu
Peter Voulkos
Stan Welsh
Kurt Weiser
Beatrice Wood
Betty Woodman

University Center Gallery

Opening Reception, Sunday, April 15, 2-5 p.m.

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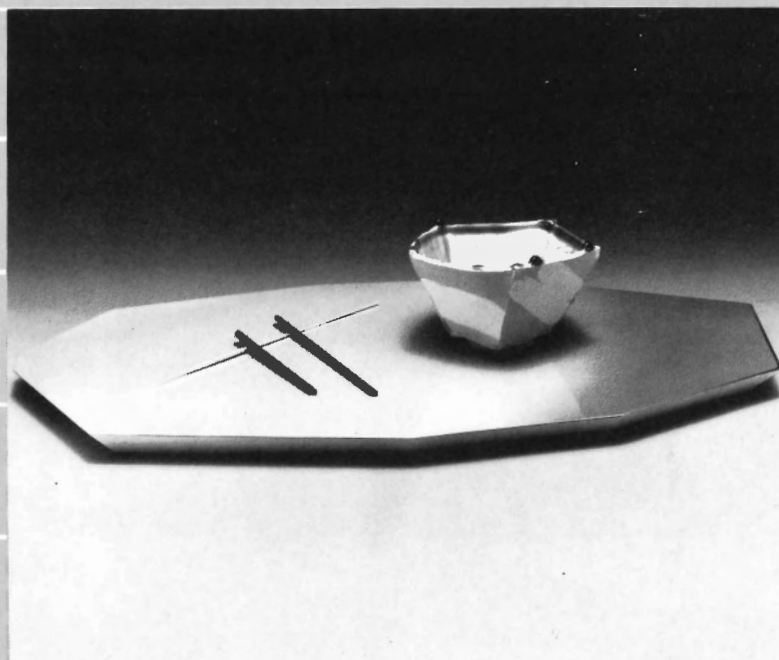
The Private Collection

Tommy Simpson
Wood/Mixed Media
May 5 - June 2, 1984



*Hexagonal Jar, 1984 12" H x 10" Dia.
Photo by Brian Oglesbee*

TED RANDALL



*Teabowl, Tray Ceramic/Lacquer
on Wood 17" L x 9" W x 6" H
Photo by: Charles Frizzell*

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